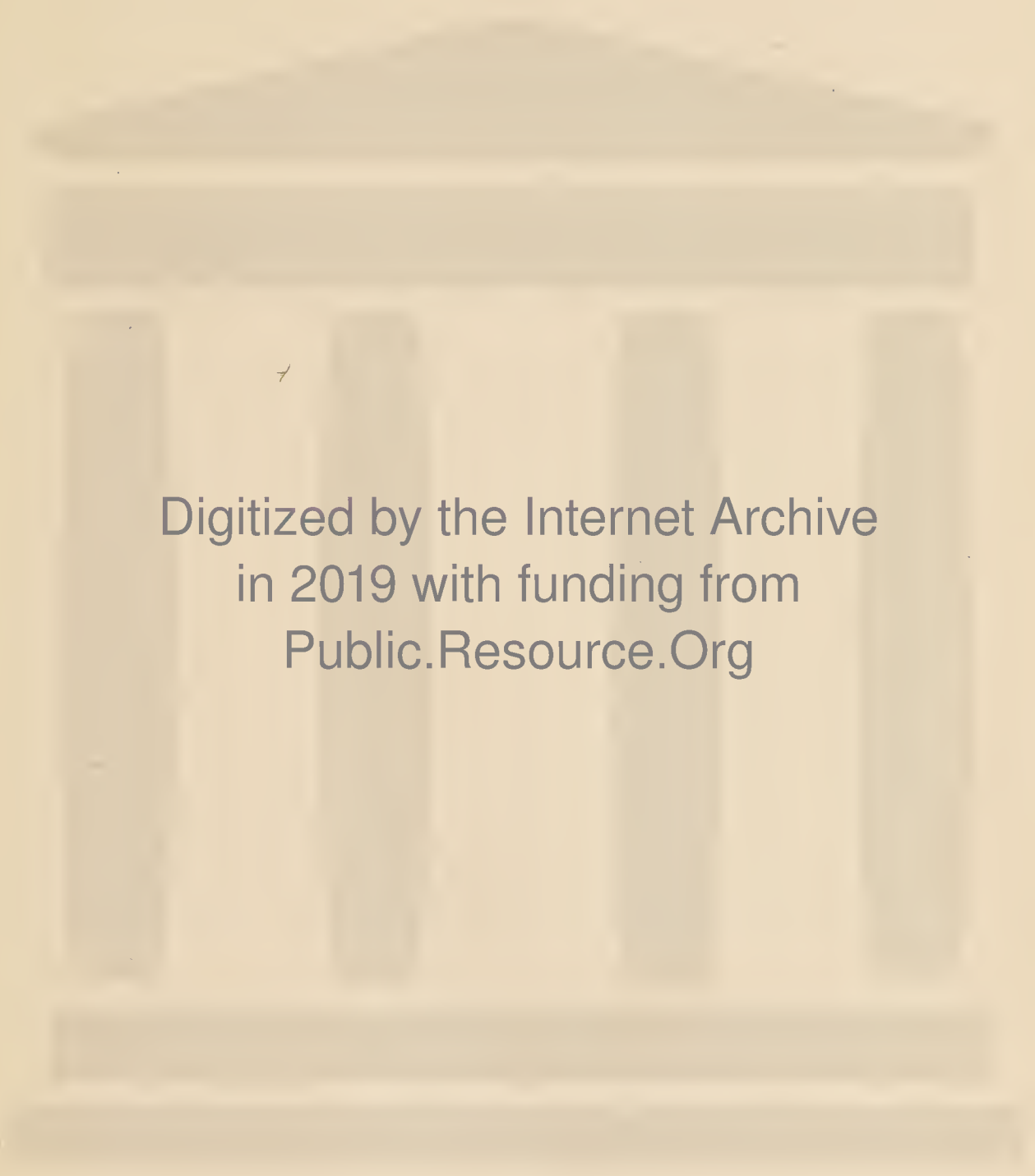


Old Post Bags

ALVIN F. HARLOW

OLD POST BAGS



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THE OVERLAND MAIL IN THE MOUNTAINS

OLD POST BAGS

The Story of
THE SENDING OF A LETTER
IN ANCIENT AND MODERN
TIMES

By Alvin F. Harlow

Author of "Old Townpaths," etc.

Introduction by Joseph Stewart
Executive Assistant to the Postmaster-General, U. S. A.



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FOREWORD

AGAIN it seems advisable to remind the reader that *Old Post Bags*, like a former work, *Old Towpaths*, deals with the past rather than the present; it is a history, not a discussion of modern methods. It tells the story of the beginning and development of mail service; of letter carrying in its earlier, cruder and to us more colorful phases. Some of those older and more primitive methods, as will be seen herein, are still in use in certain foreign countries and in remote corners of our own.

For assistance in gathering material and pictures, the writer is indebted to the United States Post Office Department and especially to Floyd Montgomery, Chief of its Information Bureau; to the Postmasters at Nashville, Tennessee, Concord, New Hampshire and Kansas City, Missouri; to the Post Office Departments of Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and Iceland; to the United States Consuls at Berne, Berlin and Copenhagen; to the Library of Congress at Washington; to the Reichspostmuseum at Berlin; to Paul Gerhard Heurgren of Stockholm, Sweden; to the Official Tourist Bureau of Batavia, Java; to the New York Historical Society; to Harry A. Franck, the well-known travel writer; to F. E. Compton & Co. of Chicago; to the Scott Stamp & Coin Co. of New York; to Richard W. Kaak of New York; to the Abbot-Downing Co. of Concord, New Hampshire; to Arthur Ackerman & Son of New York; and as always, to the excellent New York Public Library.

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INTRODUCTION

AMONG the heritages which have come to us and which we enjoy as a matter of course without our special wonder, is the boon of postal communication. At a trifling charge for postage and with no other participation than that of entrusting the missive to the care of the government the individual has his communication delivered to any other person with celerity, certainty and security. Under a national policy intelligence is carried between every part of the Nation, and under the Universal Convention between countries the whole world is united into a single postal territory for the exchange of correspondence.

Commerce from time immemorial has leveled the barriers between countries and softened their aversions, but the easy and inexpensive means of world-wide communication has been the greatest factor in establishing universal standards of thought and action and of promoting amity and good will throughout the world.

The post has advanced with the making of history. Its beginnings are generally found developing along two lines, the couriers and messengers of the ruler or the state, and the various means employed by the private citizen. The first was devoted solely to the purposes of authority; the second to private needs in which the traveler, the itinerant peddler, the wandering pilgrim or the ship captain was the carrier of the message, if the sender was not in that class who dispatched his own servant or slave.

These two generally merged and ultimately developed into a public service under the control and conduct, if not the monopoly, of the State, for the use of all the people.

So intimately is communication associated with progress

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that we may say that modern civilization took its rise from the time the caravan wended its way across the plains and primitive man launched his frail bark upon the seas to carry intelligence and trade to distant lands.

The caravan has given way to the railways and airplanes and the ships have evolved into the great ocean liners. But between these extremes there were the picturesque beginnings and the development of ancient, medieval and modern systems—the services of the foot-runner, the courier, the messenger, the postrider and post chaise. These are traced in the following pages with entertaining detail and sympathetic understanding as of the contemporary observer. Like the purpose of the classical historians who lived and mingled with the people about whom they wrote, the author often presents the people's impressions and estimate of the service as they were receiving it. Journals, diaries, letters, books of travel and forgotten newsprints of the times are all drawn upon to give us the contemporary appraisal.

The large measure of benefits which are received from our postal service and the dependence upon it for the realization of our social and business aspirations awakens in us an interest in these beginnings. If one but thinks of a cessation of the service he will realize the isolation to which we would be subjected. Nor could the new means of broadcasting alter the situation, for physical transportation so essential to a personal transfer of intelligence and the distribution of articles of trade and aids to culture would be missing.

The account of the beginnings and development of the American postal service must always read like a romance. No one can learn of the lone footman or postrider following the trails through the wilderness, across the mountains and plains, of the "pony express," or the Overland Mails to the far-flung settlements without feeling the thrill of the pioneer spirit, and a lasting respect for the men and women of those

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trying times. Nor will he lay down the page without appreciating the great rôle our postal service has played in the pioneering of our people, the development and enhancement of the public domain and the nationalization of the widely separated settlements, states and territories.

Our country and our social structure experience such rapid changes and the treasuring of historical data upon matters of commonplace interest is so rare, that the gleaning of information from the available and the obscure sources and its preservation in works of this kind are especially desirable lest it be lost to us.

JOSEPH STEWART

Washington

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CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE LETTER

The first aim of language was to communicate our thoughts; the second was to do it with dispatch.

TOOKE

BECAUSE of a lack of written records, the story of the human race can be traced through what is by comparison but a mere moment or two of its existence; and this lack of written records is due in a considerable degree to the lack of a system of writing. Though some written history and legend may conceivably have been lost, yet the mist which begins to gather about both of these at a point some four or five thousand years behind us, and thickens until no more can be seen beyond, is doubtless caused by the fact that somewhere just beyond, we reach a time when men had no written language wherewith to set down what they knew or believed. Before those days, all history and legend, all law and custom, all rite and dogma, must be memorized and passed down by word of mouth.

Men must have had a spoken language, or languages, such as they were, for ages before they began to write. What a pity that the anthropologists—who so readily visualize not only the skulls but the fleshy covering of the same and then the bodies of men of the far-distant past of whom a mere sliver of bone may be found—what a pity that these scientists cannot tell us precisely what quality of brain functioned be-

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neath those thick skulls, and to what extent their owners had developed a language! Probably not much in the way of conversation can be credited to Mr. Pithecanthropus, whom the savants assume to have been a citizen of Java about a million years ago. Old Neanderthal, who lived, so they say, not more than forty thousand years ago, may have confined his remarks to the "few monosyllables ha, he, hi, ho" (and hum?), which Lord Monboddo used to conjecture as comprising the vocabulary of primitive man; while the comparatively recent Cro-Magnon family may have been almost fluent conversationalists.

The principal question that concerns the present examiner is whether they found any method of communication necessary or possible aside from such spoken language as they might have had. Undoubtedly, as people grew in understanding and their horizon enlarged, it would be found desirable to have some way of sending a message to those who were not present in person. This must have been first done by the use of symbols, a system which is still in use in some form or other among savage races, and which has been employed by far more civilized peoples within a comparatively recent age. Thus a torch sent to one's own allies was a call to war; a weapon or other symbol to an enemy meant a challenge to war. A palm or olive branch signified peace; a red rose was a message of love, and so on. The picture in Scott's *Lady of the Lake* of Roderick Dhu sending forth the blazing cross to call the Clan-Alpine to arms shows how ancient symbolism survived among the Scottish Highlanders through what we call medieval times. Readers of Whittier will remember how the Indians sent a snake skin filled with arrows as a defiance and a warning to Miles Standish, and how the doughty captain retorted by returning the skin filled with powder and ball. Broadcast messages will also come to mind—the throbbing of the alarm or war drum across miles of jungle, the beacon fire on the hilltop, the

The Beginnings of the Letter

telegraphically intermittent smoke column of the American and Australian aborigines. Australian natives greatly increase their smoke vocabulary by using different materials to make smoke of varying colors and density.

And of course there has always been the messenger who could be sent to bear a communication by word of mouth. Probably in a majority of cases, but not always, the bearers of such messages were experienced at the business; yet one fancies that many a misunderstanding must have occurred as a result of the notorious inability of the average human being to repeat any statement correctly a short time after he hears it. A Pacific island chieftain, shortly after writing had been introduced by the missionaries, expressed in admiring terms the advantages of the new system over the old: "Formerly, when I wanted to send words to a chief on another island, I told my words to a messenger. And perhaps he would forget. The other half perhaps he would misunderstand. Now I put my words on paper—just what I mean. I shut up the paper and seal it, and nobody can see what is in it. My messenger carries the paper, and if he knows not what message he carries, no matter. My friend opens the paper and there my words are, just as I wrote them."

Centuries before they began to write, human beings began to draw pictures. Primitive mankind doubtless ornamented their bodies, their implements and their weapons, just as do primitive peoples of to-day. This decoration they presently found to be useful in marking their own property. The paddles of the Aleut Indians of Alaska, each painted in its owner's own particular design and color scheme, are an example. Folk began drawing pictures, too, scratched on rock or other surfaces, of the things they saw about them—animals, birds, trees, human beings, stars. Some began modeling in clay. Undoubtedly, these first drawings and sculpture represented merely the first crude stirrings of an

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artistic spirit; they could have had no other motive behind them than the joy of creation. But eventually the pictures came to have a ceremonial usage, and likewise to be used as communications.

At first, these communications, being stationary, were necessarily addressed to the public in general—a sort of “Know-all-men-by-these-presents,” as it were. A conqueror thus celebrated his great deeds, a court artist recorded the incidents of his chief’s reign. More ordinary folk then began making their announcements. In a report of the United States Bureau of Ethnology, one finds a pictorial announcement which was scratched on a slab of wood by an Alaskan Indian and hung at the door of his hut during his absence to explain to whomsoever it might interest where he had gone and what he was doing. A series of crude representations of skinny little men in various positions was interspersed with other symbols—a circle with two dots on it, a picture of some sea animal, etc., all in regular sequence, from left to right. The whole, as read by a practiced eye, meant, “I have gone by water in that direction to an island with two huts on it [the native reader would doubtless guess at once which island was meant] where I shall spend one night. I will then go on to another island, where I expect to kill a sea lion, and then return home.”

An instance of one of these public announcements, used in almost identical form by a savage and a civilized people, is found in the bee hunter’s warning. When an Australian savage finds a swarm of wild bees hived in a hollow tree, he cuts his own particular mark in the bark to signify that he is the discoverer and therefore the owner of the swarm, and thereafter no one else will cut that tree or rob the hive of honey. A precisely similar code of procedure is in vogue among the southern Appalachian mountain people, with whom the writer has often tracked bees and participated in the felling of the hive trees.

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But presently man is sending by messengers symbols expressly designed to convey certain intelligence. The most primitive form was the first message stick, which the runner carried, and which merely had notches on it to jog his memory, somewhat as we tie a string around the finger for a similar purpose. A later development of the symbol letter is seen in the Australian message stick, a sort of cigar-shaped affair on which, for example, a serrated design scratched with a sharp instrument meant an invitation to a community emu hunt, while a cross-hatched design was an invitation to hunt the wallaby.

Probably the next step was that of drawing actual pictures and sending them, scratched on stone, on wood, on bone, and later, when painting media were discovered, drawn on hide, on the bark of trees and even on the leaves. It is a curious fact that the Greek word *biblos* and the Latin word *liber* both meant bark, and both later came to mean book, the Greek word being altered slightly to *biblia*; and from these have been derived not only our word Bible, but many other words having to do with books. Our word book, by the way, is derived from the Danish *boch*, meaning beech bark!

As centuries passed—for no one can guess what ages may have drifted by while ignorant, slow-witted mankind were evolving the art of writing—there came at last the practice of combining pictures phonetically to produce the syllables of words, as we used to do in the not so long ago when we played charades. This is the basis of the Chinese alphabet, if it may be so called. Following this ancient plan, we might spell a modern word, “antidote,” by drawing a picture of an ant, another of an eye, and—what shall we say for “dote”? Here is something other than a concrete object to be pictured. A need like this gradually brought forth a series of symbols to represent actions, emotions, periods of time, states of being. So we may suppose that the syllable

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“dote” would be represented by the face of a doddering old man. Thus was born the ideograph, which conveyed the idea of a thing without expressing its name; as, the moon to denote a month, a palm leaf to signify a year, the reason being that the palm was believed to put forth invariably twelve leaves in the course of a year.

The next step was the use of little pictures of objects to represent the letter with which their names began. This is most beautifully seen in the old Egyptian writing. There, for example, a tiny silhouette of a lion (*labo* in Egyptian) would represent the letter *L*; a reed leaf (*aak* in Egyptian) would be used for *A*; and a checkerboard (*mene*) for *M*. With these three symbols they would spell lamb, for the Egyptian would have brains enough not to put a totally silent and unnecessary better *b* on the end of the word as we do. The Egyptian schoolmaster, as Dickens once remarked, instead of showing his pupils that *A* is for apple and *B* for bull, would point out to them that apple is for *A* and bull is for *B*.

There were a number of other signs to round out the system: a little half moon to indicate that a certain word was a person's name, a shield or a line enclosing the word to show that the name was that of a royal personage, and so on.

As centuries more rolled by, the increase in the amount of writing done and the consequent necessity for speed caused the pictures of animals and other things to be slurred in the making until they resembled less and less the objects for which they were originally intended. Thus the Egyptian hieroglyphics in course of time gave way to the hieratic, or priestly style, and that in turn was followed by the demotic, or popular style, which at last began to look like a real script. Only faintly here and there in the Chinese writing of to-day may resemblances be traced to the original ideographs.

The Hebrew alphabet is likewise so greatly changed that

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the original intent of the letters is now almost or quite unrecognizable. In the oldest form of the Hebrew character (the Samaritan) the first letter originally represented the head of an ox; its name, *aleph*, denoted *A*. The second letter pictured a house or tent (*beth*) which stood for *B*; the third in its earliest form the head and neck of a camel (*gimel*) which gave the sound *G*; the fourth represented a door (*daleth*) which gives us *D*. The Greek alphabet, with its *alpha*, *beta*, *gamma*, *delta*, followed this closely; and when they wished to speak of the whole system, they called it the *Alpha-Beta*, whence we get "alphabet."

All alphabets are believed to be derived from these ideographic origins, though it must be admitted that most of the Roman letters which we Americans use have come so far from their earliest form that no one can now say what that was.

With alphabets slowly developing under their hands, learned men could now actually put their thoughts upon some sort of writing surface and send them to another person at a distance. The old symbols—the torch, flower, the marked stick or shell—did not keep the message secret; but real writing could be achieved and deciphered only by the few. It need not be concealed even from the messenger who carried it, for he could not have read it had it been to save his life. If he were a governmental messenger, even the petty officials who were his immediate superiors would probably be quite as ignorant of the meaning of the queer, crooked marks as was he. Thus secrecy was conserved.

There has been much vain speculation upon the question, "Who wrote the first letter?" and some theorists have even assigned that distinction to Queen Atossa, daughter of the great Cyrus of Persia. Such surmising is as futile as if we were to ask, "What man first spoke the English language?" The letter, like a language, was not invented; it grew. Letters were being written hundreds of years before Atossa's

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time—that we know. There are in European museums letters “written”—that is, impressed in the queer cuneiform characters upon clay tablets—in Babylon and Nineveh at least two thousand years before the time of Christ, and actually enclosed in a baked clay envelope! We have letters in Egyptian hieroglyphics, too, at least as old. Homer, who may have written anywhere from 700 to 1200 B.C., was familiar with letters, for he tells how King Prætus dispatched Bellerophon with a missive:

To Lycia the devoted youth he sent
With tablets sealed, that told his dire intent.

Eleven centuries before Christ, when King David of Israel desired the beautiful Bathsheba for his own, he sent her husband, Uriah, with a letter to Captain Joab, which said, “Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die.” Doubtless Uriah could not read, and the king was therefore perfectly safe in perpetrating this hideous bit of treachery; he might even have sent the letter unsealed. Perhaps Joab, too, had to ask his secretary or orderly to read the letter to him; for we notice that when he sent news of the battle and the death of Uriah back to the king, he did not write a letter, but gave the message orally to a courier, as was the commonest practice of those days.

A little more than a century later, Jezebel, the evil wife of an evil king, is found writing letters in her husband’s name to the elders and nobles of Jezreel, fellow townsman of Naboth, whose vineyard King Ahab desired, instructing them how to frame up a charge of blasphemy against Naboth, so that he might be stoned to death and the king might then seize his property. This is a very early instance of the circular letter; of which King Jehu furnishes another example a few years later when he writes to the officials and

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elders of Jezreel, ordering them to gather together Ahab's sons for slaughter, after the pleasant custom of the period.

The Old Testament is dotted thickly with references to letters. After the exiled Jews, by King Cyrus's permission, had returned from Babylon and begun to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, certain churlish neighbors wrote to Cyrus's successor, Artaxerxes, urging that if the Jews were allowed to rebuild, they would become domineering, refuse to pay tribute and get completely out of hand. Here is an early example of the poison pen letter, though probably not the first, by thousands of years. King Artaxerxes, in replying to this communication, begins his letter with a sentence which has a strangely familiar ring: "The letter which ye sent unto me hath been plainly read before me." At last we discover whence the modern American business man derived his opening sentence: "Yours of the 11th received, and contents noted."

About 521 B.C. occurs another interesting example of the circular letter, when Ahasuerus or Xerxes of Persia, after having, to his intense astonishment, had one of his commands flouted by his queen, Vashti, sent circular letters in great haste all over his kingdom, insisting that every man must be ruler in his own house—whether it was physically possible or not.

Josephus, the eminent Jewish historian of the first century, A.D., says that in his day there were still preserved in Tyre the letters from Solomon (at the time of the building of the Temple) to the great King Hiram of Tyre, and from Hiram to Solomon; also letters from Xerxes to Ezra, one of the rebuilders of Jerusalem; from Artaxerxes to the government of Judea, from Antiochus the Great to Ptolemy Epiphanes, from the Samaritans to Antiochus, from Onias to Ptolemy and Cleopatra, and many others. What a priceless collection that would be were it in existence to-day!

Quite naturally, writing was utilized chiefly by the power-

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ful—monarchs, great nobles and the agencies of government. From the time that any sort of government began to function, the rulers began to find some means of communication necessary. They must receive reports and send orders. Before the day of written language, there was always the messenger who repeated, as best he could, the order or news which had been given him verbally, and there was the call post, by which quicker transmission was gained. Diodorus Siculus, the ancient historian, describes the stations of the call post in Persia long before the time of Cyrus, where a line of men at some distance apart “gave notices of public occurrences from one to another with a very loud and shrill voice; by which means news was transmitted to court with great expedition.” Cæsar saw in Gaul an organized system “like that in Persia”: a line of men across the country on hilltops and towers, shouting in stentorian tones the message from one to another—and finely garbled it must have got in windy weather. The Spanish invaders said that they found the same system in use in South America in the early sixteenth century, the callers being stationed on wooden towers. It must have given Pizarro, who could not read, considerable satisfaction to listen in now and then on this highly public method of communication of the enemy.

But good Roman print itself would have been no greater mystery to the bluff captain than the Peruvian system of communication by means of knotted twine was to all Europeans, clerks as well as clodpolls. The Incas, like the Mayas and Aztecs, had a pictorial or hieroglyphic writing, but the messages sent by their swift-footed *chasquis*, or messengers, were contrivances of colored string, variously and intricately knotted. These messages were called *quipus*, and a public officer called a *quipucamayoc* had charge of the state archives, where no doubt there were miles upon miles of the knotted twine. The quipu message consisted of one main cord, from which, like a fringe, depended a number of smaller cords

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of different lengths, colors and knotting. We are solemnly assured by Spanish writers that not only financial accounts, public and private correspondence, but even poetry were as easily expressed by quipus as by writing. Padre Acosta declared that an Indian once recorded the general confession of his whole life in quipus. "With it in his hand, he confessed as if reading from a written paper."

Returning for a moment to the call post, it was evidently an institution of considerable antiquity, an improvement on the old signal fires and smokes, which, however, continued to be used by some peoples in lieu of a telegraph until modern times. Æschylus in the "Agamemnon" graphically pictures the watchman in the tower of Atreus, straining his eyes to catch the beacon fire which should give news of the fall of Troy. Even in modern Europe signal fires have called from hilltop to hilltop in rapid succession, especially in time of war, as when the Spanish Armada neared England in Elizabeth's time. Macaulay writes of that night when the fleet was sighted:

From Eddystone to Berwick bound, from Lynn to Milford Bay,
That time of slumber was as bright and busy as the day.
For swift to east and swift to west the ghastly war-flame spread.
High on St. Michael's Mount it shone; it shone on Beachy Head.
Far on the deep the Spaniard saw, along each southern shire,
Cape beyond cape, in endless range, those twinkling points of fire.

The Scotch were great users of the signal fire, especially against their ancient enemies, the Southrons. In *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* the approach of the English is announced by beacon fires from the border stations, along "height and hill and cliff":

Till high Dunedin the blazes saw
From Soltra and Dumpender Law;
And Lothian heard the Regent's order
That all should bowne them for the border.

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An act of the Scottish Parliament in 1453 provided that "one bale or faggot shall be the notice of the approach of the English in any manner; two bales that they *are coming, indeed*; and four bales blazing beside each other, to say that they *are coming in earnest*."

A reminiscence of this ancient method of conveying intelligence was seen in the row of cannon posted eight or ten miles apart along the Erie Canal and the Hudson River in 1825, which carried to New York City in eighty minutes the news of the starting from Buffalo of the first boat to go through the new waterway.

The foot-running dispatch messenger was a souvenir of those ancient days when men of the Eastern Hemisphere had not yet tamed and learned to ride the wild Asiatic horse. Perhaps they were riding donkeys long before the horse; but a good sprinter could make better time than the ambling and sometimes stubbornly stationary donkey. In Old Greece one hears much of the *hemerodromes*, young men employed in carrying letters, who often ran great distances at high speed; of the runner who carried the news of the victory at Plataea one hundred and twenty-five miles in a single day; and of the messenger who brought word of the victory at Marathon to Athens at such speed that he fell dead after delivering it. In the ruins of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia there was found a sandstone pedestal which once bore a brass statue of Philonides, a hemerodrome of Alexander the Great. On the pedestal is the inscription, "King Alexander's express messenger and traverser of Asia, Philonides, Zoitos's son, from Chersonesus in Crete, has dedicated this to the Olympian Zeus."

There were no horses in the New World when it was discovered, and all dispatch bearing was therefore being done on foot. The Spaniards found in Mexico and South America governmental runners whom Antonio de Herrera claimed equaled a horse in speed. Prescott, after examining sundry

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evidence, thinks each runner must have covered a stage of less than five miles—but at such speed that a message was carried one hundred and fifty miles in a day. Mexico and Central America had ideographic writing startlingly similar to that of Egypt, and some writers say that the couriers carried messages written with those symbols; but it seems evident that there were couriers in Mexico who carried verbal messages; men trained from childhood by priests and said to have had memories equal to that of the man who so instantly recalled Mr. Addison Sims of Seattle after several years' separation. Their position as repositories of many state and private secrets gave them an added dignity which brought them considerable prestige and emolument. These messengers, like those of Peru, were housed at relay stations only a few miles apart, and are said to have accomplished from one hundred to two hundred miles a day.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLIEST ORGANIZED POSTAL SYSTEMS

—And so it is borne from hand to hand along the whole line, like the light in the torch race which the Greeks celebrate to Hephæstus.

HERODOTUS

SO far as we moderns know, the relay system of carrying messages is first mentioned in the sixth century B.C. by Herodotus, as existing during the reign of Darius of Persia, on a plan followed for centuries afterwards by many monarchs and governments. Here the couriers were for the most part mounted on horses. All along the main roads, at convenient stages (whose length King Cyrus determined by exhaustive tests of a horse's capacity) were relays or post houses, where numbers of horses were kept. At some of these the rider merely changed horses; but finally, when his stint was done, he stopped at one of the stations and passed his dispatch on to a second rider, who was supposed to be refreshed and ready to continue through the night, if necessary. In the words of Herodotus (according to the beautiful translation carven on the façade of the New York Post Office): "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." The messages they carried were scratched on bronze blades or impressed into the clay tablets or tiles which were the commonest form of writing surface in the Persia, Assyria and Babylonia of those days. The Book of Esther reveals (8:10) that in Xerxes' time not only horses but mules, camels and dromedaries were used in the Persian post.

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This system was called *angara*, which in the Pehlevi or Parsee language simply means *corvée*, or the obligation long claimed by a monarchic government from its citizens to lend their personal assistance and that of their servants and employees, their beasts and implements for carrying out a service which is not remunerated. For at least fifteen centuries thereafter (and no telling how long before) this obligation was claimed by governments for the operation of the courier service.

The system was supposed to have been installed by the great Cyrus, the first king of "greater" Persia. Plutarch says that Darius I, the mighty monarch who reigned from 521 to 486 B.C., was, before he ascended the throne, superintendent of the *angari*. Many writers have given Cyrus (or Darius) credit for inventing the relay system of carrying intelligence; but that it was in vogue long before their time is proven by a verse of the prophet Jeremiah (51:31) who wrote not later than 580 B.C. and who, in predicting the fall of Babylon, said, "One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another," while the Book of Job, which might have been written anywhere between the early sixth and the eighth century B.C., says, "My days are swifter than a post; they flee away."

Both these quotations are given in the language of the King James translation; and in King James I's time "post" was the word generally used for a system of dispatch riders. It is a word which, from a Latin origin, crept into most of the languages of Europe in a form varying but slightly, when at all. It is a shortening of the French *poste* and the Italian *posta* or *poste*, both meaning a station or position, especially as of soldiers, and both derived from the past participle, *positus*, of the Latin verb *ponere*, to place. The early governmental messenger systems having stations where horses and riders were kept in readiness, the word became metonymically used, first, to denote the messengers them-

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selves, next being applied to the letters and packages which they carried, and finally to the whole mail service.

The word post, as referring to a bearer of tidings, good and bad, came to have many and varied usages; for example, in the eighteenth century it had come to be synonymous with news. Schiller referred to joyful news as a *Freudenspost*, and even to-day some old-time Germans call bad news a *Hiobspost*.

Meanwhile, other writing surfaces than clay and bronze were being developed—bone or wood, for example, covered with wax, which proved vastly popular in Greece and Rome, for making memoranda and writing letters, the words being scratched in the wax with a stylus. Many a patrician or statesman carried a notebook whose leaves were three or four thin sheets of wood covered with wax and fastened together with rings. If you wrote a letter to a man, he could glance over it while the messenger waited, then smooth the wax and write his reply on the same surface. If a messenger carried secret matter in his letter and sudden danger threatened, he could quickly obliterate the writing.

Two other great media were discovered before the Christian Era. The Egyptians gave papyrus to the world, and it was very gratefully taken up by both Greece and Rome; and parchment first began to be used in Asia Minor some three or four centuries before Christ. The Egyptians took the inner fiber of a rush native to their country, cut it into strips, placed a layer of the strips side by side across another layer with the fiber at right angles, wet them both and pressed them together until they amalgamated into a sheet, something like paper. Palm leaf was also used to some extent in a manner similar to papyrus; and it is interesting to note that palm was still in use in the British Indian service no more than fifty years ago.

When a letter was written on palm or papyrus or parchment it was usually rolled and tied with a string. As more



From a painting by C. Traga. Plate from Paul Gerhard Heurgren, Stockholm

ARRIVAL OF A COURIER OF THE CURSUS PUBLICUS OF ANCIENT ROME

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people acquired the art of reading, more care was necessary to preserve secrecy. Fearful and artful systems of knotting were therefore devised, so that it could scarcely be untied save by the initiated, and even if it were, it could not be retied again in the prescribed way. A little later, these knotting devices were made unnecessary when the ends of the string began to be covered with clay or wax seals.

Ciphers were even invented. Julius Cæsar used one, and presumably others of his time did so. The Greeks had a curious contrivance called the *scytala*, or letter staff, invented by those crafty deceivers, the Spartans, to baffle curiosity and espionage. The *scytala* was a round stick or baton whose thickness must be precise to the fraction of a millimeter. When a secret message was to be sent, a narrow strip of white parchment was rolled tightly and in a spiral manner around the staff; then the message was written *across* the laps of the strip, that is, lengthwise of the staff. To read the message it must, of course, be rolled around another staff of the prescribed size. Every government official, envoy and military commander took such a staff with him while traveling.

Paper did not become known in Europe until the time of the crusades. The first known mention of rag paper occurs in the twelfth century, while Chinese paper made of cotton fiber was used in Greek manuscripts in the thirteenth century, but apparently did not become popular, for its use did not spread. The Chinese had been making and using paper for ages before the Caucasian world heard of it, as is attested by Chinese letters in European museums dating as far back as the fourth century A.D.—and there is no telling how long they had been using it then.

Ancient Egypt had its relay dispatch system also. One of the Ptolemies is mentioned as receiving his letters every day, which argues a rather extensive service. But the largest and most efficient postal system of ancient times was (as

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might be expected) the famous *Cursus publicus* of the Roman Empire. This was a vast establishment brought to a high degree of competency by the Emperor Augustus, though an organized messenger system somewhat similar to that of old Persia had existed in Rome before his time. Vergil, who died in 19 B.C., was familiar with such an arrangement, for he wove it into his imagery:

Now Jove himself hath sent his fearful mandate
through the skies;
The post of gods is come!

The *Cursus publicus* was, of course, intended for governmental use only. It was employed to facilitate the journeys of the monarchs, to send messengers of the government and of foreign ambassadors to and fro (as well as the envoys themselves upon occasion), to convey government money and to afford facilities for travel to officials dispatched on distant mission and to persons of distinction specially authorized—all this in addition to its primary duty of carrying dispatches. Thus for the first time one finds a messenger service utilized to convey passengers as well as information, a function which the post continued to exercise in Europe even down into the nineteenth century.

In the operation of the *Cursus publicus*, relay stations were established at short distances with about forty horses at each. The postal service then, as ever afterwards, brought about the improvement of roads; and five great trunk lines running out of Rome were paved in the excellent Roman style for its accommodation. The first line ran via Capua, Neapolis (Naples) and Rhegium, across to Sicily and thence to Carthage. The second via Capua to Brundisium (Brindisi), thence across the Adriatic to Dyrrachium, Macedonia, etc. The third ran via Ariminum (Rimini) and Aquilegia to Istria, Illyria, Pannonia (Hungary), Moesia, Thrace, Byzantium (Constantinople) and thence across the Bosphorus

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to Asia. The fourth was via Centum, Callæ (Civita Vecchia), Pisa, Genoa, Massilia, Nerbo and across the Pyrenees to Spain. The fifth ran via Mediolanum (Milan) and the Alpine passes to Gaul, Britain and Germany.

The ships which linked up these lines were expected to be equally as prompt and efficient as the horse service. We are told that the terrible-tempered Tiberius was apt to tear up his letters in a rage if they were more than the specified number of days in coming from a given province. No doubt there was some official who gathered up the pieces, and when the peevish monarch had cooled off, he was quite willing to hear whether there was anything important in the letters or not—though by that time the unfortunate messenger who brought them had doubtless been beheaded or boiled in oil.

The *tabellarius*, or courier who bore the dispatches, had a large, bronze, shield-shaped badge, and rode on horseback or in a chariot. Passengers were conveyed in express carts drawn by horses or mules, and war goods in bullock carts. In the fourth century A.D. the courier in remote districts is pictured as riding one horse and leading another which carried the mail bags. As to speed, Gibbon discovered the instance of one Cesarius, a magistrate of rank in the time of Theodosius the Great, who, journeying from Antioch to Constantinople, began his journey in the evening, and was in Cappadocia, one hundred and sixty-five miles away, by the following evening. On the sixth day, about noon, he reached Constantinople, having covered seven hundred and twenty-five Roman miles or six hundred and sixty-five English miles.

The official or person of influence who traveled by the post was driven by a lesser official, sometimes preceded by a courier; was entitled by his passport to fresh horses at every posthouse and comfortable, almost luxurious accommodation at such a station where he chose to spend the night. Roman efficiency is seen in the carefully prepared list of foods fur-

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nished for his sustenance, the exact quantity of each, down to the ounce, being specified. All this cost him nothing ; but it was a difficult accommodation to obtain save when he was in the service of the state. That the law rigidly forbade any private use of the post by travelers without the emperor's consent is proven by letters which passed between Pliny the Younger and his close friend, the Emperor Trajan. Pliny, who by virtue of his official position held warrants for the sending of officials and important personages by the post, thus apologizes :

I have never, Sir, accommodated any person with an order for post vehicles or dispatched a courier provided with one, except upon your affairs. I find myself, however, at present under a sort of necessity of breaking through this fixed rule. My wife having received an account of her grandfather's death, and being desirous to wait upon her aunt with all possible expedition, I thought it would be unkind to deny her the use of this privilege ; as the grace of so tender an office consists in the early discharge of it ; and I well knew that a journey which was founded in filial piety could not fail of your approbation, etc., etc.

To which the genial emperor replied :

You did me justice, my dear Pliny, by confiding in my affection towards you. Without doubt, if you had waited for my consent to forward your wife on her journey by means of those warrants which I have entrusted to your care, the use of them would not have answered your purpose ; since it was proper this visit to her aunt should have the additional recommendation of being paid with all possible expedition.

The members of the new cult called Christianity, among the minor persecutions which they were called upon to bear, numbered that of being sent to serve in the posthouses for their strange and seditious teachings. Christianity had obtained a considerable foothold in Rome when the Emperor

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Maxentius, about A.D. 308, sent Pope Marcellus I to work in the stables as a punishment, not for being a Christian, but for his severity towards his weak Christian brethren who had yielded to the force of persecution and turned apostate.

Interesting as an outgrowth of the Roman post were the *curiosi*, officials whose duty it was to prevent frauds and embezzlements with regard to the *Cursus publicus* and the public vehicles. But they were also expected to keep the government informed of everything that happened in the provinces, particularly if it were of a suspicious nature. Quite naturally this led to spying, and they came to be a dreaded and pernicious institution. They probably did some of the first official letter opening. Their name was a derivative from the word *cura*, meaning care; and through their activities, to be curious, instead of meaning careful and painstaking, as it originally did, now has the less pleasant implication, "inquisitive," or, as we are more apt to put it, "snooping" or "nosey."

There is no proof that the *Cursus publicus* was ever used for private letters. The ordinary citizen, then, as for centuries afterwards, must depend upon his own servants or upon private hands to deliver his missives. There are hints of this in Cicero and other writers of those golden days of Roman literature. Servants carried letters about the city, and for greater distances one must depend upon traders or ship captains, unless one were wealthy enough to send one's own courier, a slave or employee, who, by the way, had sometimes no easy job of it, what with finding accommodations for himself and his horse and getting relays of horses if his errand demanded speed. Letters of those days frequently acknowledge the receipt of two or more from the same correspondent at the same time, one having overtaken another on the leisurely road, and all perhaps having finally arrived on a single ship or by the same hand.

The letters of the Apostle Paul and the Book of the Acts

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of the Apostles show how friends and disciples were utilized in carrying missives. Paul, Barnabas, Judas Barsabas and Silas were sent by the church in Jerusalem with letters to the brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Paul's letter to the Romans seems to have been carried by a woman, Phebe, a member of the church at Cenchrea. The brethren who bore his two messages to the Corinthians and the one to the church at Ephesus are all mentioned by name; and Epaphroditus, a messenger whom Paul's friends at Philippi had sent all the way to Rome with gifts to alleviate the discomfort of his imprisonment, carried back the epistle to the Philippians.

It is believed that on certain occasions carrier pigeons were used in connection with the *Cursus publicus*. This is easily believable, for pigeons were in use as couriers long before the time of Christ. One of the earliest references to them occurs in the ninth ode of Anacreon (who wrote early in the fifth century B.C.), where the dove (dove and pigeon are confused in the language of many writers throughout history) is made to say that it now belongs to Anacreon and serves him, its duty being to carry his love letters. The Romans are said to have learned the utility of pigeons from the Greeks and to have begun using them at least two centuries before Christ. When Mutina or Modena was besieged by Antony in 44 B.C., Decimus Brutus, the beleaguered commander, communicated with the Consul Hirtius by pigeon. "What was the use," asks Pliny, "of the wall, of the sentinels and even of the nets set in the river, to Antonius, now that messengers took their way through the air?"

References to pigeons are frequent in ancient literature. Taurosthenes sent news of his victory at Olympia to his father at Ægina by means of a piece of purple tied to a pigeon's leg. Spectators in the Roman amphitheaters would loose pigeons from their laps at the conclusion of a big

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gladiatorial match to let distant friends (and possibly betting commissioners) know quickly the name of the winner. The merchants of Aleppo are said to have sent pigeons by ship to Alexandria to bring back commercial news.

What sort of ink did the ancients use on their papyrus and parchment? The earliest known was a "body color," much thicker than that of to-day; in fact, more like paint, and applied with a brush. Later lampblack or soot was made the base of ordinary ink; Pliny mentions the black from burnt ivory and soot from furnaces and bath-heating apparatus. We are also asked to believe that the cuttlefish's "ink" was employed. The ink on ancient manuscripts and that found in the inkstands of Pompeii was much more opaque and encaustic than that of to-day. In Roman days, colored inks were popular, purple being specially reserved for the use of emperors. Gold ink was known, though used more by the Greeks than the Romans. The manufacture of gold and silver ink, by the way, became a regular business in the Middle Ages, when these and other colors were in demand by monks and clerks for illuminating manuscripts, making initial letters, etc. There is evidence that some of the ancients drew lines, and probably wrote, with soft leaden styli, the forerunners of the modern lead pencil.

CHAPTER III

LETTERS AND LETTER CARRYING OF THE MIDDLE AGES

The letter is a voiceless messenger, and the messenger is a living letter.

EPICTETUS

WITH the fall of the Roman Empire in the West in 476, the *Cursus publicus* disappears in Italy, though still continuing to function in the Eastern or Byzantine half of the empire, centering in Constantinople. The barbarians were now beginning to use ideas which they had adopted from the Romans. Under Clovis, a powerful king of the Franks (born about 465, died in 511), the first monarch to make Paris a capital, one still finds traces of the old system in that all his subjects in the former Roman territory must provide horses and rations whenever and wherever the king traveled. It is evident that the system was also used to convey intelligence; for in writing of Clovis's son and successor, Childebert I, Gregory of Tours tells how on a certain occasion he "issued letters and despatched his pages by the public conveyance."

Thence for two hundred years such history as we have says little regarding courier service. But when the mighty Charlemagne came to the Frankish throne in 768 and revived—in theory—the old Roman Empire, with a theoretically Christian aspect, calling it the Holy Roman Empire, he also strove to bring the *Cursus publicus* back to life. How far he succeeded is uncertain, but it is clear that after his death, when weaker kings succeeded him, the system fell into decay, and a special courier was employed only when

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occasion required, getting through to his destination as best he could.

Little more is heard of courier service for another two centuries. Then, strangely enough, there comes an item from Poland, in the reign of Boleslaus the Bold (992-1026) who first made Poland a real kingdom and under whom it enjoyed a momentary greatness. It is written that this king required the municipalities of his realm to provide horses and drivers for the transmission of the royal decrees. His successor extended the obligation to villages and parishes. There was a long code of rules governing the operation of this business, the making up of accounts and so on. But Poland quickly lapsed to a semidependent condition again, and no doubt the regular courier service declined with it.

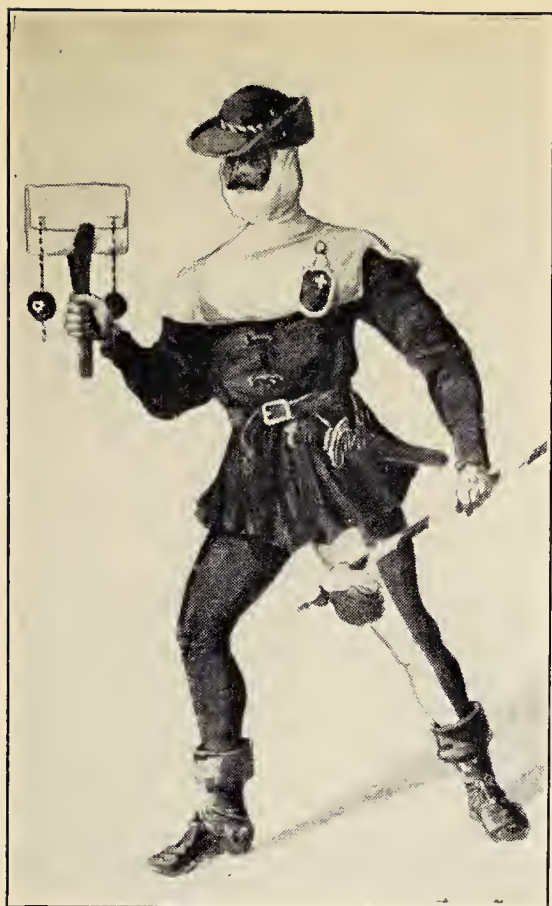
But throughout these Dark Ages there was little letter writing, even among kings, and a goodly deal of information was conveyed by word of mouth. One must try to conceive an age when there were no colleges nor even common schools, when rulers and even many of the clergy were immoral, filthy and ignorant. Nobles and knights were illiterate, and proud of it. Reading and writing were for churchmen, clerks (a rather despised profession) and perhaps a few highbrow women. A real, upstanding man scorned such things. Facilities for sending letters were crude and poor in the extreme. An occasional wandering friar or pilgrim, trader, peddler or ship captain were the only possible agencies, unless you had a friend going in the desired direction. You gave a liberal fee—supposing you had the means to do so—to the man who first took the letter, and if it had to go a long way and pass through other hands, it accumulated other charges along the road. Sometimes it was months or years in reaching its destination. In fact, the chances were about three to two against its getting there at all. For this reason people usually refrained from trying to send letters long distances unless they could find a man who was going the whole

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way and would agree to place the missive in the very hands of the addressee. Conditions were so discouraging that one would almost expect letter writing to become a lost art.

The blackness that fell over the civilized world seemed to be complete when the Saracens burned the great library of Alexandria with its seven hundred thousand volumes in 640, and when the Byzantine Emperor Leo III, about 730, burned the library in his own city, Constantinople, together with the librarian and transcribers, because the latter had offended him. But here and there in rectories and monkish cells, by the light of tapers but little more feeble than the flickering lights of learning and civilization, then so near extinction, a handful of men with cowled and tonsured heads cherished the fragments that were left to them of ancient history and literature; though even some of these, in their bigoted zeal, made the world distinctly the poorer by discarding much old written treasure simply because it was pagan. An occasional individual of these—St. Ansgar, Eginhard, Fortunatus, Baudemind, Bede, Alcuin, King Alfred, to mention some of the most noted—stood out from the rest principally because he was so far above the average of his time. Of the correspondence of these men but little remains to us, and much that we have is not remarkable.

By the eleventh century the cloud which had hung over Christendom for six hundred years and more was appreciably lifting. Once more letter writers appeared whose communications were of such excellence that they are admired to this day. There had been great letter writers in Rome's golden age—such as Cicero, Seneca and Pliny the Younger, not to mention the Apostle Paul; so great that they set a standard towards which many vainly strove in the period of decline which followed them. The letter became a subject for thesis and criticism. Philostratus and Libanius, Greek sophists and rhetoricians of the third century wrote learnedly regarding the method and style of letters, as did



From Swiss Post Office Department
COURIER OF SCHWYZ, FIFTEENTH
CENTURY



From Swiss Post Office Department
COURIER OF BASEL, SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY



From an etching by Albert Dürer
A MEDIEVAL MOUNTED COURIER

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also Symmachus, Roman orator, writer and politician, and Gregory Nazianzen, the theologian, Bishop of Constantinople in the following century. Gregory Nazianzen, in a letter to Nicobulus, said, "The right measure of letter writing is the requirement of the subject-matter. For we neither ought to be long where there is not much to say, nor brief where there is a press of matter. That is the best epistle and the most happily composed which is calculated to bring its matter home both to the learned and the unlearned, and which is understood as soon as read. The third requisite in letter-writing is grace of expression. But it must avoid altogether a diction dry and harsh. . . ."

No more comment do we hear upon letter-writing method until the period of awakening. Towards the end of the eleventh century the Deacon Alberich, of the Benedictine Monastery of Monte Cassino, near Naples, set forth his theory of the proper structure of the *dictamen* or letter. He divided it into five parts; (*a*) the *salutatio*, or introductory greeting; (*b*) the *captatio benevolentiae*, or attempt to predispose the recipient in favor of the writer; (*c*) the *narratio*, or statement of the purpose of the letter, or (*d*) the *petitio*, or request to be made (according to the purpose of the communication); and (*e*), lastly, the *conclusio*, or termination best suited to the general tenor of the letter. In the seventeenth century the letter was even divided theoretically into twelve parts!

There were some famous letter writers in Alberich's time: Bernard, the great Abbot of Clairvaux, for example, who died in 1153, and Hildebert of Tours, whose life ended in the following year. Hildebert, who was first Bishop of Le Mans and later Archbishop of Tours, wrote letters (in Latin, of course, as were almost all the clerical documents of the time) whose style was so fine that they were later used as models in the French schools. Other great letter writers of the twelfth century were Thomas à Becket, Arch-

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bishop of Canterbury, Otto von Freising and John of Salisbury, the noted English ecclesiastic and scholar who went over to France and became Bishop of Chartres.

One wonders what clever scribe of that century it was who played a colossal joke on the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenus (and in fact, on the whole of Europe) by writing a letter which purported to come from that mysterious Christian monarch, Prester John, whose domain some thought was near India, while others insisted it was in Africa, around Abyssinia and beyond; that monarch who was served by seventy-two kings, and whose marvelous land, although the abode of peace and justice, was, as the letter asserted, also "the home of elephants, dromedaries, camels, crocodiles, metacollinarium, cametennus, tensevetes, wild asses, white and red lions, white bears, white merles, crickets, griffins, tigers, lamias, hyenas, wild horses, wild oxen and wild men; men with horns, one-eyed, men with eyes before and behind; centaurs, fauns, satyrs, pygmies, giants forty ells high, Cyclopes . . . the home also of the phoenix and of nearly all living animals. . . ." So firmly was Prester John believed in that Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) sent him a letter by a messenger who strode bravely out towards the dawn and never returned. Who knows? Perhaps that courier actually reached Prester John's kingdom and found it so delectable a land that he chose to round out his life there, rather than come back to the blood and turmoil of Europe.

It was now that some of the greatest of medieval monastic establishments began to rise—such as that of Cluny, founded in the tenth century, La Grande Chartreuse in 1084 and that of the Cistercians at Cîteaux, near Dijon, in 1098. All these and others were centers of correspondence. As early as the seventh century King Clotaire had issued to the monastery of Corbeja (Corbie) near Amiens, letters patent granting it the right of free conveyance for all its necessities. As

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other abbeys rose, increased in power and influence, and (to be frank about it) as more of the inmates learned to read and write, a livelier intercourse was kept up among them and with other parts of Europe. The Abbey of Cluny maintained communication to the southwest as far as Spain, and northeast to Hungary and Poland. It had a number of subordinate monasteries, all of which kept up correspondence by means of monks or servants who traveled on horseback. The Cistercian order, which had its headquarters at Cîteaux, had nearly a thousand monasteries scattered over Europe, all keeping in touch with each other by letters.

Next the great universities began to be born, that of Paris claiming to be the earliest in Europe. Schools had been founded there under the Frankish successors of Charlemagne, and as two or three centuries went by, they multiplied and then began to cohere. Some put the beginning of the university as far back as 1140, but its formal origin seems to date from a decree of King Philip Augustus in 1200, consolidating all the schools into one which was to be called the *Studium*. Fifty years later it had begun to be known as the University of Paris.

The universities of Bologna and Salerno were but little younger than that of Paris. Padua was founded in 1222, Naples in 1224, Toulouse in 1229, Salamanca in 1240, Genoa, 1243, Perugia, 1276, Lisbon and Macerata both in 1290. The schools at Oxford began to combine in the twelfth century, and three of the university's most important colleges were founded between 1249 and 1268. The first college of Cambridge was founded by the Bishop of Ely in 1257.

In the records of most of these universities, particularly those of Italy and France, one finds frequent reference to the grand and petty official messengers (*Magni Nuncii*, and *Parvi Nuncii*). The petty messengers were the ones who did the work; the title of the others was purely honorary.

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From the very beginning of the schools, need was found for a method of maintaining communication between the students and their homes. Of course there was a desire for the exchange of personal news, especially when illness menaced one party or the other; but the chief need of the university student then, as it is to-day, was that of a quick and efficient means of sending home for money. As many of the students were scores or hundreds of miles from the parental roof, the transmission of great numbers of such letters and of the money—necessarily in coin, as there was then nothing else—could not be entrusted to chance wayfarers. Accordingly messengers were appointed, who, although often magnificently referred to as *nuncii volantes*, or flying messengers, went on foot throughout the earlier centuries of university history, as did most of the other couriers of their time.

Let the stone-broke and desperate undergraduate of to-day fancy, if he can, one of these medieval Mercuries plodding along over rough roads, inquiring his way, if it were his first trip in this direction, going astray now and then, finally reaching the pater's home in anywhere from two or three days to two or three weeks or a month. Then, perchance, father or whoever held the purse strings might not be at home, and days might be spent in getting in touch with him. Now when he has read the letter, he brings—grumblingly, no doubt—the coin from his iron-bound chest or secret hiding place; or if he happens to be short of cash, sends a man out to collect some rents or to draw on a friend or a debtor, the messenger meanwhile eating and sleeping comfortably in the servants' quarters. In the course of a week or so he might be ready to start back.

The accompanying picture with its caption, taken from M. de Rothschild's entertaining book on the French posts, would indicate that in some households, such as that of Messire Jehan, the parents could not read or write, and there-



*From "Histoire de la Poste de Lettres,"
by Arthur de Rothschild*

A MESSENGER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS,
FOURTEENTH CENTURY

"Messire Jehan, behold the bag of money which I bring from the good lady, your mother. She adjures you to study hard, to go to bed early and not to frequent the taverns."

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fore the whole commission must be executed by word of mouth.

Rabelais, in one of his wittiest passages, pictures Pantagruel meeting a sophisticated student from Paris, reeking with Latinity, who thus describes the stringency among the *escoliers* while awaiting the return of the messengers from home: "And if by fortune there be rarity or penury of pecune in our marsupies, and that they be exhausted of ferruginean metal, for the shot we dimit our codices and oppignerat our vestments, while we prestolate the coming of the tabellaires from the Penates and patriotic Lares." No wonder the amazed Pantagruel exclaimed, "What devilish language is this? By the Lord, I think thou art some kind of a heretic."

Special privileges of citizenship without its obligations were granted to students and teachers of the University of Paris, for the reason that they were looked upon as ecclesiastics (*clerici*). In Italy they were not regarded as clerics, but had all the rights and practically none of the responsibilities of citizens. All were entitled to safe conduct everywhere, without interference by local authority. Naturally, the messengers would be likewise entitled to safe conduct; and they received many other privileges, too, such as exemption from certain military duties. In fact, their job was regarded as so desirable that it was much sought after.

The oldest known reference to the messengers of the University of Paris is a decree of King Philip the Fair, written in 1297, while he was at war with Guy, Count of Flanders. In this document the French king solemnly guarantees the safety of the Flemish students at the university, taking them and their couriers under his own special protection. He warns constables and magistrates that teachers, students and messengers must not be molested, but must be protected from injuries by ill-disposed persons and attacks by the enemy forces. In a decree confirming the privileges of the uni-

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versity in 1315 King Louis X also warns all and sundry against interfering with the university messengers.

It is really astounding, and inclines one to think the better of that age when one finds how much zeal was shown in behalf of education. Many young men who desired to study in the universities were poor, and could never have acquired an education had they not been able to borrow money. For every great school wealthy men were found who were willing to loan money to the students; in fact, such men often became in effect a part of the university organization. In the original charter of the University of Naples, dated 1224, the Emperor Frederick II agrees to appoint respected citizens who were to loan money to the students on pledge or security. The students must agree to stick to their books, finish their courses and in a certain sense mortgage their future incomes if they had no collateral security to offer.

These citizens, to whom so much credit was due for the advancement of knowledge, thought some recognition of their services should be given them. Seeing the military exemptions and other privileges of the university messengers, they desired a similar reward, and accordingly were designated "Grand Messengers" (*Magni Nuncii*) with all the rights and immunities connoted by the title.

Teachers and students at the old German universities also had their couriers. In a Latin document of the dukes of Austria concerning the foundation of the University of Vienna in 1365 the teachers and pupils had "either servants or messengers" who brought them "books, gold, silver, wearing apparel, etc." On its foundation in 1386 the University of Heidelberg was granted the right to have sworn messengers (*nuncii jurati*). A document of June 20, 1397, appointing Nicolaus Moer a messenger of the university is still in existence.

From the University of Vienna one finds service definitely established to certain other cities, particularly those where

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other universities were located; as for example, there was a Breslau messenger, a Prague messenger, a Linz messenger and so on. At this time the Capuchin monks were also maintaining a regular communication by messengers out of Vienna to neighboring monasteries.

After a century or two on foot, some of the university messengers began to go mounted on horseback, and still later even came to use wagons and carts. At first they were exclusively in the service of the teachers and students; but as time passed they began to carry letters and to do errands for other people—conveying legal documents, money, jewels and other small packages, and collecting information upon any desired subject. Even before they began using vehicles, they were carrying, that is, escorting passengers, supplying them with horses and board by the way.

It is a remarkable fact that the University of Paris clung to its messenger service franchise until the eighteenth century. Of that, more later.

The improvement of long-distance communication is an index of the revival of civilization. While the abbeys and universities were establishing courier systems, other agencies also began to feel the need of some better means of conveying intelligence. As learning and culture began to stir and slowly to open eyes still dull with the coma of the Dark Ages, commerce revived with them, and was much stimulated by the crusades. Many of its representatives then were similar to the clock and tin peddlers who used to traverse our own countryside decades ago. When one of these itinerant traders had established a regular route, visiting the same villages, manor houses and convents once or twice a year, and had proven himself reasonably honest, he was more and more entrusted with letters and packages until he became a sort of private postman.

Even merchants of substance went on many business errands themselves because of the difficulty of getting re-

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sponsible representatives. One of Sir William Stonor's correspondents in England told him that for a long time he had had two letters for him, but could not find any one to carry them save a woman, and as soon as she was on horseback in the street, she was arrested. The sturdy, bustling commercial cities of northern Germany, which, for the protection of their trade by sea and land against robbers, pirates and hostile governments, had banded themselves together in an organization which they called the Hanseatic League, were painfully aware of the pressing need for better communication among themselves and with their customers. They were accordingly sending, probably as early as the latter thirteenth century, their municipal and business letters, contracts, etc., as well as moneys and small parcels, by couriers who came more and more to have definite routes and times of arrival and departure. The principal foreign marts with which they dealt were London, Bergen, Bruges (later Antwerp) and Nijni Novgorod. Some very important lines were those running from Hamburg eastward through Nuremberg, Breslau, Stuttgart and Vienna, and from the Low Countries through Cologne to Augsburg. In 1552 Augsburg was even sending messengers regularly to Venice. But the possibilities of this service were too limited to admit private letters.

Fancy one of these postmen trudging southeastward from Hamburg through Berlin to Breslau, whence perhaps his route would waver to northward to pass through Warsaw, and so on to Novgorod. The messenger is clad in leather or in the fustian cloth of the period, and on his breast, shoulder or arm he bears the coat of arms of his city, or of his university or his noble master, if he is not a town messenger. At first he carried his letter in his hand or in a cleft stick; but later, when his mail increased in quantity, he wore at his side a wallet or bag or metal case. In his hand, as a rule, he bears a long wooden staff tipped with an iron point—

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in effect, a spear; this not only for defense against vicious dogs and vicious men along the way, but also as a vaulting pole for leaping over brooks and ditches, and as a staff when walking fallen trees across streams or hopping from hummock to hummock through morasses. Real roads were almost non-



From an old Viennese playing card

AUSTRIAN COURIER, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

existent in central and northern Europe in that age, and the messenger's course was often a mere trail through field and forest. In the woods he might encounter not only robbers but wolves, which were still numerous in wooded regions all over Europe. Many couriers carried a short sword or dagger for better defense against such enemies.

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Notwithstanding the difficulties of these journeys, it is asserted by old historians that these foot postmen performed their rounds so regularly that the day, and even the hour of their arrival could be confidently predicted—which strains one's credulity a bit.

The Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights was in theory the official protector of the Hanseatic League. The Teutonic order was founded in Palestine during the crusades, and in 1276 built its great castle at Marienburg, near Dantzic, as an outpost against the heathen Prussians, Lithuanians and others to eastward. This soon became the seat of the Grand Master of the order, which was so active and powerful that it set up a messenger service of its own, connecting its various castles and lodges. These were the aristocrats of early medieval courier service, in that they were mounted. "The first marshal of the horse," says Johannes Voigt, the historian, "was, so to speak, the Court Postmaster, for he had the post-horses—called *Schweiken* or *Briefschweiken*—under his orders. He was the superior officer of the so-called 'letter stables'—*Briefstall* or post-office. The post horses were exclusively for the letter service. The horse and postboy were changed at every castle, and the *Comthur* must state on the address face of the letter when he received and when he dispatched it." A building mentioned in Vienna at the end of the fourteenth century, *Das Deutsche Haus*, appears to have been a station for the couriers of the Teutonic Knights on the route from Marienburg to Venice and Rome.

Thus the universities, a group of cities and a knightly order were the first agencies in Europe, aside from the kings, to maintain organized messenger staffs; and not more than one of these could be said to operate on anything like a regular schedule. Kings, corporations, bishops, abbots, nobles, sheriffs, all dispatched their couriers only when there was something to send, and only on their own business. But some of these maintained considerable staffs. The Im-

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perial Court of Justice, or *Reichskammergericht* at Wetzlar, instituted in 1495, had, like some other corporations, a rather extensive messenger system. Twelve mounted couriers were maintained from the beginning, and to this were added later twelve to twenty-four foot messengers.

Other folk, even those tolerably well to do, were still compelled to depend for their letter carrying upon those whose business or whim led them by highway and byway into other cities and countries—merchants, Jewish peddlers, itinerant journeymen of various trades, pilgrims and friars (often barefoot), crusaders limping home from Palestine, butchers going about the country to buy cattle. In Germany these butchers became an important postal institution.

King John (1199-1216) is the first recorded English monarch who kept a staff of messengers (again we find them called *nuncii*), their expense being charged to the household account. Under the succeeding king, Henry III, they grew sufficiently important to wear the royal livery. Edward II (1307-1327) kept twelve messengers on a fixed salary, who attended him wherever he went, always ready to start at a moment's notice. They were paid threepence a day when on the road, and an allowance of four shillings, eightpence a year to buy shoes. Wages and traveling expenses then were what we would call "nominal." In a letter written by Sir John Paston in 1471 he remarks that "Courby the carrier hath had tenpence for a third hired horse" on a journey from London to Norwich and back.

Such messengers were sent to carry letters to the kings of other countries, to call the members of the legislative assemblies together, to carry proclamations of new laws, to invite foreign princes and nobles to tournaments, to summon the nobility, lay and clerical, to the capital to attend royal funerals, to give notification as to periods of mourning, to distribute papal decrees and to execute many less important and more personal errands of the court. One finds in 1396

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a messenger of the Duc de Berri traveling from France across England to Scotland to procure some greyhounds of a breed which his master fancied. Three mounted men accompanied him to assist in caring for the dogs, and he bore a safe-conduct from the King of England. A courier might also have the delightful task of conveying one of the four quarters of a man thus dissected for treason into some distant part of the country, there to be exhibited as an object lesson to other possible malcontents.

Presents were made to the bringer of good news in those days, and thus a lucky courier occasionally had opportunity to add something to his meager salary, particularly if he bore good tidings to a king. Edward III of England settled an income of forty marks for life on the queen's messenger who, in 1330, brought him the news of the birth of a Prince of Wales—the Black Prince. He gave thirteen pounds, three shillings, fourpence to John Cok of Cherbourg, who told him of the great victory of Poitiers in 1356 and the capture of King John of France; he settled a hundred shillings of rent upon Thomas de Brynchesley, who brought the story of the capture of Charles of Blois.

Messengers were often rewarded according to their station, or rather, according to the rank of their masters. When in 1216 Jacques d'Euse, Cardinal-Bishop of Oporto, was chosen pope at Lyons as John XXII, the news was carried in ten days to Edward II of England at York by Lawrence of Ireland, messenger of the house of the Bardi—and fast work that was for those times, too. The king gave Lawrence twenty shillings for the favor; but when Durand Budet, the Cardinal Pelagrua's messenger, arrived forty days later with the official announcement of the election, he received five pounds; and finally, when the new pope's own nuncio ambled in on his red velvet saddle cloth with the same stale news, he was handed no less than a hundred pounds. Always, to him that hath is given.

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These messengers of royalty and nobility were of course highly privileged. They could demand preference in the matter of fresh horses and accommodation at any stopping place; and the English royal messenger, by the way, was always mounted and a good horseman. No one dared stop them, and they could make short cuts through private land wherever and whenever they chose. To hinder them seems sometimes to have proven a more serious matter than interference with the United States mails to-day. A courier from the queen to King Edward I about 1300, who was halted and imprisoned by the constable of Roxburgh Castle, claimed ten thousand pounds damages in behalf of the king for contempt, and two thousand pounds for the offense to his own feelings.

Langland, in his *Piers Plowman* series, written late in the fourteenth century, compares the advantages enjoyed by the messenger over those of the traveling merchant or peddler. The latter are impeded by their packs, their debts and their fear of robbers. The messenger travels much faster because no one dares interfere with him, he can ride right through a farmer's field of wheat if he likes, and no hayward (a sort of fence and cattle policeman) would halt him, no well-balanced man would think of complaining of the damage. Thus Langland:

Yf a marchaunt and a messenger metten to-gederes
And scholde wende o way where both mosten
reste . . .

The marchaunt mote nede be lette [kept] lengere
than the messagere:

The messagere doth na more bote with hus mouth
telleth

Hus erande and hus lettere sheweth and is a-non
delyuered.

And thauh thei wende by the way tho two to-
gederes,

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Thauh the messenger make hus way a-mydde the
whete,
Wole no wys man wroth be, ne hus wed take;
Ys no haiwarde yhote [bidden] hus wed for to take:
Necessitas non habet legem.
Ac yf the merchaunt make hus way ouere menne
corne,
And the haywarde happe with hym for to mete,
Other hus hatt, other hus hode, othere elles hus
gloues
The marchaunt mot for-go, other moneye of hus
porse. . . .

Geoffrey Chaucer, the O. Henry of his day, spent many happy hours in the inns frequented by messengers, packmen, sailors, tinkers, sellers of indulgences, even as his modern prototype dressed in rough attire and sat on park benches or in cheap lodging houses, listening to tales of adventure, romance, crime, love and revenge from all quarters of the world. Eagerly Chaucer mingled with such company:

Somme new tydyngis for to lere,
Somme new thinge, Y not what,
Tydyngs other this or that,
Of love or suche thinges glad.

He knew that many of the yarns told him were not true, but what of that? True or fictitious, they all made delightful raw material for his weaving and reweaving:

And lord! this hous in alle tymes
Was ful of shipmen and pilgrimes,
With scrippes bret-ful of lesynges [lies],
Entremedled with tydynges,
And eke allone be hemselfe;
O many a thousand tymes twelve
Saugh I eke of these pardoners,
Currours, and eke of messangers,
With boystes crammed ful of lyes.

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Only metaphorically does he mean that the messengers' "boystes" were crammed with lies. The lies were in their heads; their bags, srips and pouches were filled with letters, documents and packages.

The messenger was not only the letter carrier, but also to the extent of his ability the parcel postman. He carried many gifts for his masters and employers, sometimes making the purchases himself. An English country gentleman is found ordering a fine hat for himself from London, no doubt a confection of velvet and plumes and what not, and, fearing that it will be damaged if packed and carried in a box, he directs that the messenger wear the hat on the way, of course taking proper precautions in case of rain.

Passports were highly desirable for messengers traveling in foreign countries in those troubled and suspicious times. The courier not infrequently found himself in a ticklish position, but he was usually a nervy, resourceful fellow who knew pretty well how to take care of himself. In time of war, although he might be from a neutral country, he was liable to fall under suspicion and might at any time be stopped and searched, and his letters opened. Often he found it desirable to conceal the fact that he was a messenger, and sometimes even went so far as to destroy his letters. Even in time of peace some citizens looked with a suspicious eye upon foreigners—merchants, friars and the like in particular—who might write information detrimental to the country in their letters to other lands. In England in 1346, when war was being carried on with France, the House of Commons made recommendations which indicated the establishment of a letter-espionage bureau. One paragraph of this proposed law read:

Item, be it prohibited everywhere, that any alien send letters beyond the sea, or receive letters which come thence; unless he shew them to the chancellor or to some other lord of the Privy

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Council, or at least to the chief wardens of the ports or their lieutenants, who shall further shew them to the Council.

For centuries the lack of good roads was a detriment to travel and communication, and therefore to civilization. Save where a bit of fine old Roman road remained here and there, the so-called highways were literally a delusion and a snare. Chaucer's Pardoner hinted to his fellow pilgrims at the outset that it would be a good idea for them to have their sins forgiven—at the usual rates—before starting, for even in the short ride from London to Canterbury there was no assurance that some one might not fall

Doun of his hors, and breke his nekke atwo.

A petition to the English king in 1472 declares that the city of Gloucester "is full febly paved and full perilous and jepardous to your liege people to ryde and goo within the same toune, insomuch that dyvers and many persones of your Lieges have be there gretely hurt oftentymes, and in grete perill of their lyves." Other cities complained of being in similar condition. The country roads were worse—full of pitfalls, bridges broken down or no bridges at all, and travelers must find their way through the water as best they could. At one time the stretch of road between Abingdon and Dorchester was "by an increase of water so much surrounded" that no one could pass over it save at the peril of his life. To plunge into such a pool without knowing its depth and history was foolhardy; for, as Mrs. Green relates in *Town Life in the 15th Century*, a miller of Aylesbury in 1499 dug a clay pit in a highway, ten feet long, eight feet broad and eight deep, in which a traveling glove merchant was drowned. A local jury acquitted the miller of any wrong, on the argument that he had nowhere else to get the particular clay he needed.

Even in London in the reign of Edward IV the road along

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the Strand was so badly overflowed that members of Parliament were delayed on their way to the halls at Westminster. And yet decade after decade passed, and there was little improvement. In the sixteenth century wheeled vehicles were a rarity in the island. Queen Elizabeth used to ride from the palace at Greenwich into the city on a pillion behind her Lord Chancellor. Wagons without springs first came into use in her reign, and she rode in one to her fifth Parliament.

Notwithstanding the dreadful roads, some couriers succeeded in covering ground at remarkable speed. When Edward IV was at war with Scotland in 1481 he established post stations and riders at intervals of twenty miles on the road northward, whereby dispatches were carried two hundred miles in two days; a record, by the way, which was not surpassed for hundreds of years afterwards. In 1542 letters reached Edinburgh on the fourth day out from London.

Spain was another country where organized messenger service appeared at an early date. In the thirteenth century (and perhaps earlier), at the courts of the various Spanish kingdoms, there were royal couriers called "saigs," or more commonly "trotters." Before 1350 there were twenty royal messengers in attendance upon the King of Aragon. There were likewise private messenger systems in the larger cities of the peninsula, maintained by the merchants, who for this purpose formed themselves into brotherhoods each of which was under the protection of some saint. These systems were very strictly regulated. Every messenger who exceeded the stipulated time on a journey and could not give a good excuse, suffered a five-day imprisonment and a fine of fifty sols.

A century later the brotherhood of Barcelona, after some ups and downs, were still continuing their messenger service, and had even improved it. By the fifteenth century Barce-

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lona was sending her carriers sometimes as far as Genoa. Here for the first time we find a special fee paid for quick delivery. The regulations also provided that letters and parcels were to be handed only to the addressees in person, or left at their homes; and that nobody save the addressee should be permitted to read letters. The brotherhoods of the various Spanish cities often came into conflict over their messenger service, and the couriers themselves, as well as innkeepers and hostlers, suffered many a broken head in rows over horses and sleeping quarters. These city messengers had no easy time of it, and must greatly have envied the better protected and better accommodated royal couriers. Their journeys by land were uncomfortable and unsafe, and by sea, though generally more pleasant, were always subject to danger from storms and Moorish pirates.

In France the royal dispatch-carrying arrangements were generally desultory until the crafty, testy, ambitious Louis XI came to the throne. Casting about for means to further his political schemes, he saw that a considerable hindrance to his aims lay in the slowness of communication. He accordingly organized in 1464 the first royal, regular messenger service of the Middle Ages, that is, the first with definite routes and relay stations equipped with horses and paraphernalia. To carry the letters he appointed no less than two hundred and thirty couriers. His organization was in fact very like that of ancient Persia. He prohibited the postmaster, on pain of death, from furnishing post horses to any one, no matter of what rank, without an order from the king. In 1481 he authorized private persons to send letters by his post, but only on payment of such high rates that nobody save the gentry could avail themselves of the service. All letters must be examined, to make sure that they contained nothing prejudicial to the king. Papal nuncios and couriers of foreign princes and potentates, friends and allies of France, were permitted to make use of the

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organization, "on paying fairly and obeying the existing regulations."

This foundation of Louis XI is by many considered to have been the beginning of the present French postal system. It was also a model from which several other European monarchs copied messenger systems of their own. Louis' son, Charles VIII, extended the institution, which, until the following century, was used almost solely by the court and foreign royal couriers. Charles published a decree forbidding the couriers, on pain of death, to convey any letter written against the holy decree of Basel or the pragmatic sanction. The historian Delamont remarks of this, "Letters would have had to have some odor or special scent by which the couriers might recognize them, in order to escape the gallows; the calling of a courier left much to be desired."

It was through their Moslem opponents during the crusades that Europe learned of the existence and of the composition of paper; but European royalty and nobility long scorned the use of the new commodity. The prince or the cardinal still wrote—or a clerk wrote at his dictation—his letter on fair parchment; it was rolled into a scroll, tied with silk, the hot wax over the knot received an impression from the seal ring of the slender, the liveried messenger deposited it in his scrip and rode away on his errand. But paper came into favor much more rapidly among merchants and common folk. It was cheaper, and a letter written upon it could be folded into a flat packet, which was far more convenient to handle than the scroll, and could be more easily sealed. The string now became unnecessary, the seal being placed over the edges of the folded paper. Another two or three centuries, and wafers or paper seals began to replace the troublesome wax. The address at first was written on the back of the folded letter. Not until the beginning of the nineteenth century was the envelope invented.

Let us pause to remark that there were other and less

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conventional ways of conveying messages in those rollicking medieval times than by the hand of a carrier or even the wing of a pigeon. Does not Robert Louis Stevenson tell us in his thrilling manner of how, during a certain stage of the Wars of the Roses, men suddenly fell, struck down from some neighboring covert by the dreaded black arrow, which always bore a sinister message to the party or friends of the slain, signed "Jon Amend-All"? An old French romance, *Histoire de Gabrielle de Vergy*, relates how, in the twelfth century, "one morning the Lady Fayel, while passing through the gallery, saw an arrow with the point embedded in a window embrasure. To this arrow was attached a letter from the Sire de Courcy." Other notable instances might be cited, and there is no reason to doubt that such things actually took place. In order not to interfere with the accuracy of the arrow's flight, the message, necessarily brief, would have to be written on the shaft of the missile itself or perhaps on a small piece of paper wrapped tightly around the shaft.

One wonders if some of those messages were written "in pencil," as we express it now. At least as early as the sixteenth century, folk occasionally wrote or drew with a stick tipped with plumbago; but the mark was so soft and easily smeared that it was generally disdained for letter writing; and not until the nineteenth century did the lead pencil in its present form come into common use.

CHAPTER IV

GREAT MEDIEVAL MESSENGER SYSTEMS OF THE ORIENT

My throne rests on four pillars—a blameless cadi, an energetic chief of police, an honest minister of finance, and a faithful postmaster who gives me reliable information on everything.

CALIPH ABU DJAFAR MANSSUR

MEANWHILE, some other and very remarkable messenger systems were functioning outside of Europe; and at least two of these were far older than anything in Europe. No matter what claims to originality and pre-eminence may be made in behalf of the Caucasian race, some one always discovers that the Chinese did the thing long before we did, and frequently did it rather better. For example, it is asserted that the posting system in China, known as the I-Chan, or Government Courier Service, was in operation at least three thousand years ago, having been mentioned in the chronicles of the Chow dynasty, which reigned from 1122 to 255 B.C.

With the exception of occasional references, little descriptive matter is found concerning the government couriers until Marco Polo visited China during the reign of the Emperor Kublai Khan (1259-1294), whose grandfather, Genghis Khan, had established the Mongol dynasty in China. According to Polo's description, the post system of the great Mongol emperor outshone that of the ancient Persians and Romans. He said that upon every highroad, at distances of twenty-five to thirty miles apart, there were *yamb*, or post-houses, with rooms hung with silk, where even princes might

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be entertained in a becoming manner. At each station four hundred horses were kept, and he asserts that there were ten thousand such stations in the empire, which would indicate that there were four million horses in use; but evidently there has been some slip in his figures, for in another place he gives the total number of horses employed as two hundred thousand. Here again one finds the cities and villages in the neighborhood obliged to supply the horses used in the monarch's post service. The *corvée* idea seems to have been a very ancient one, and common to many races and nations.

Polo says that by means of relays the dispatches traveled two hundred and fifty miles a day. In cases of great emergency they rode at night and if there was no moon a man ran before the horse with a torch, which of course slowed up the pace considerably. In addition to the horsemen there were foot messengers, who by running in three-mile relays could cover more than a hundred miles a day. These men wore a girdle of bells to give notice of their approach to a station, so that another runner might be ready; and a clerk carefully recorded the time of arrival and departure of each messenger.

This post service was entirely for state purposes, only official dispatches and royal or governmental travelers being eligible for its conveyance; but it was subject to abuse. The carriers and postmasters were not infrequently bribed to take private letters; and although travelers were supposedly required to have a Hou-P'ai or official warrant before they could get horses and accommodations at the stations, yet it is known that many persons used the organization who had no right to do so, that the horses were often overloaded and driven too hard, and that people who hired them sometimes neglected to pay for them.

Through hundreds of years the Imperial Post rode its rounds, not only since Kublai Khan's day but long before

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that, and until that recent time when the Chinese decided to dispense with an imperial government, and forthwith began sliding towards a chaos of anarchy. In the nineteenth century sixteen postmasters, each presiding over a district, directed the courier service. Its principal function then was to distribute the *Imperial Gazette*, with its notices of promotion, furlough, suspension, decapitation, the winning of literary honors and of bright red buttons and peacock feathers indicating the emperor's favor. The only difference since Kublai Khan's time lay in the more recent philosophical realization that such stuff as this did not call for a delivery speed of more than fifty miles a day. Momentous documents such as those labeled "All-important Edicts" and "Positive Commands" were sent by special messenger who might ride two or three times as rapidly.

The only postal service in China which was open to the public was privately operated and developed slowly through several centuries, continuing to some extent even after 1896, when a government post was set up. The Min-Chü or private letter hong's were like our early express companies, and had their origin in the needs of bankers and merchants for some means of transporting correspondence, documents and money. These organizations followed the usual course: first started for the convenience of some particular banker or company, the keen trading instinct of the Chinese soon saw that here was a new field for public service and profit. In the nineteenth century there were scores of letter hong's in operation, some of them covering a thousand miles or more of routes. They carried their mail on horseback, on foot or by boat. The hong was in most cases a sort of coöperative society, the owners also being the postmen and taking their turns at the job. They issued circulars in which modesty struggled with self-confidence, but whose promises were tolerably well carried out. A passage in one of them praising the indefatigability of their couriers might have been



Medieval Japanese Messenger



Courier of the Caliphs of
Bagdad



Harry A. Franck

The Star Route in Modern
China



Modern Rural Postman,
Sumatra

LETTER CARRIERS OF THE ORIENT

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a paraphrase of Herodotus: "Spreading out the heavens overhead, carrying the moon, shunning neither rain nor snow, labouring with the sweat of his brow and running with all haste."

Certain paragraphs in these circulars hint that the proprietors were having their troubles with impositions similar to those in Caucasian countries:

The mercantile community must forgive us for suggesting that we hope they will not enclose too many letters belonging to other parties within the envelopes presented by themselves; as the bulk of the letter bag may thereby be increased beyond the strength of the postman, and thus occasion delay and irregularity in the delivery of letters, as well as in the return of the post.

The hong fined itself for neglect, as the next clause clearly proves. Quoting the fine in shillings indicates that much business was being done with the British:

Should any of the postmen be found guilty of dilatoriness or any violation of our engagements we will pay a fine of five shillings upon every such instance, which penalty shall be appropriated to defray the religious services of our establishment.

A pretty instance, one would say, of eating your cake and having it, too. It must be admitted, however, that the hong agreed to be responsible for the loss of money or valuables, if due to neglect on their part. The little light-draft, one-man mail boats which crept about through canals and creeks in and out of great cities such as Canton were so often robbed by river pirates that the hong suffered severely; and eventually they developed a system of insurance, under which they were unqualifiedly responsible only if double the usual fee for carriage were paid. They also insisted upon a statement of the contents of the package, for which they gave a formal receipt. In fact, most of them followed the

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custom of earlier days and gave a receipt for every letter or package. The following is a typical receipt of about eighty years ago:

30th year of Taoukwang, 5th Moon

This is to certify that we have received from Dong Gum Wong a letter, purporting to contain GOOD NEWS, for dispatch to and safe delivery at the city of Peking; of which, also, this paper is to be taken as a sufficient guarantee. Postage paid.

(Seal)

In the province of Chekiang letters were carried in what was called the Flowery Foot-Boat, for the reason that it was gorgeously decorated, inside and out, with scenes and figures. The captain or postman sat in the stern, working his oars with his feet, steering by means of a rudder handle under his arm, and meanwhile cooking his food, eating, drinking, smoking, playing the flute and singing songs to cheer his weary round. A highly progressive spirit was shown by some of the hongts late in the century when they put mail steamboats on some of the larger rivers; but even these must have a huge wooden eye, vividly painted, affixed on either side of the bow, so that the boat could see its way about.

In 1841-1842 a British colony was planted at Hongkong, and presently it was given a post office, and a mail came out from England once a month. The number of foreign citizens sojourning in the empire increased until every large city had its group of foreign post offices, all operating independently. At Shanghai in 1880, for example, there were six foreign post offices: the local or municipal, the customs, the British, French, American and Japanese, each with its own stamps.

Sir Robert Hart, a British customs official, suggested to the Chinese government in 1861 a post-office system of the European type, but no action was taken thereon for thirty-

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five years. When the Chinese postal service was finally set up, in 1896, Sir Robert organized it and was given the management of it. Later French and other European officials shared in the responsibility, and the service became one of the most reliable in the world—so asserts Harry A. Franck, who spent more than two years in visiting all parts of the country. In *Wandering in North China* he says in describing the crossing of a seven thousand-foot mountain range in Kansu Province, Western China:

Once or twice before we had met the “fast mail” hurrying eastward, and now we came upon it jog-trotting over the mountains. Two men in the early prime of physical life, with a bundle of mail-bags at each end of the poles over their shoulders and a square glass lantern lashed on somewhere, are all this consists of in interior China. They carry some eighty pounds each in relays of 20 to 30 miles made at surprisingly good speed, and on the second day returning with a similar load, all for ten or twelve dollars “Mex” a month (\$5 or \$6 American), depending on their length of service. Few postal systems are more reliable than that of China; and even though its high officials are mainly Europeans, no small credit should be given to the poorly paid coolies who are the chief links in the service in many parts of the country. Letters mailed in Peking a week after we left there were awaiting us when we reached Lanchow—for the coolie “fast mail” travels night and day; and the loss of anything posted is perhaps the rarest complaint heard even from those foreign residents who have developed into chronic grumblers against anything Chinese.

Around Lanchow, said Franck, there were Mohammedan “three-hand men” or thieves, organized into a regular guild. Many business men paid them for protection, and “the inn-keeper who held the contract for carrying government mails in and out of Lanchow paid fifteen dollars a month to the head of the thieves’ guild—through the police at their main station!—and these mails were never molested. . . . Some-

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times these efficient postal coolies are robbed, occasionally killed, but they stick to their duty. On the other hand, mailmen out here in the west have been known to rent out the oil-cloth issued them to keep the letters dry."

What remains of the mail service under the anarchy now prevailing in China it is difficult to say.

In Japan at least twelve hundred years ago nimble-footed little government messengers were trotting along roads and mountain trails with scrolls of vegetable fiber paper in their srips, and perhaps a paper lantern or an umbrella or both in the hand. The lantern and the umbrella were still to be seen very recently accompanying the postmen in Formosa. It is a curious fact that in Japan, as in Africa and early Europe, the government dispatch or aristocratic letter at one time was carried in the cleft end of a stick, as if to remove it as far as possible from the contaminating touch of the carrier. Later, as the mail increased in quantity, it was carried in two baskets, one at either end of a short bamboo stick resting across the shoulder. These messengers ran stages of from seven to twelve miles each.

Another interesting coincidence is that in Japan, as in Europe, the seventeenth century saw a long step forward in methods of communication. From 1630, when the shoguns of the Tokugawa dynasty located their seat at Yeddo (Tokio), the postal service was definitely improved. In 1660 private agencies first began to carry business and private correspondence. There were several courier systems gradually developed. One connected the three "capitals," Yeddo, Kioto (where the mikado had his seat) and Osaka, and was intended principally for commercial correspondence. It was carried on with post horses furnished by the government at specified rates of hire. The shogun or feudal chief had his own courier service and the daimio, or great nobles, had theirs. Then there were courier lines for reporting the current price of rice, and a few attempts at messenger

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service for the public, although as in Europe, most private letters were sent by the hands of itinerant priests or merchants, by carters or junk captains.

Not until the great awakening of Japan in the nineteenth century did her methods of communication advance much beyond this. After she had made treaties of friendship and commercial arrangements with America and England in the 1850's, those two countries, followed by France, established post offices in the open ports of the Empire. The marvelous quickness of the Japanese to assimilate new ideas was made manifest in the organization of a state postal system on the European model and the issue of stamps in 1871. The village postmasters had their offices in their own homes or stores. Their pay was infinitesimal, but they were satisfied because they were proud to serve the government. The curious fellows even "deemed it honorable to perform such duties as tend to benefit and promote the welfare of the public." The government strove constantly to improve its service, and a few years later added a telegraph service to the postal organization. In 1875 the first foreign mail arrangement—that with the United States—was made. The British post offices in Japan were closed in 1879 and the French in 1880.

India, like other vast oriental communities, had its royal dispatch service centuries ago. The Emperor Akbar (1556-1605), one of the great Mogul dynasty, established a system of foot posts, extending to all quarters of his vast domain. Indian runners have always been noted for speed and endurance. Some of Akbar's couriers are said to have covered eighty and ninety miles in a day without relief. Supposedly they carried a spear and jingling bells—the latter to frighten off snakes and tigers—just as the *dak-wallahs* or country postmen have done, even down to the twentieth century. The runners of recent years have covered only six-mile stages, however, instead of the heroic distances of

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Akbar's day. Early in the eighteenth century the British East India Company began establishing its own courier lines in India, and a few years later the whole country passed into the control of the British, who thereupon set up their own type of public post system.

Another great courier system arose in the Near East with the decline of the Roman power. This was the organization of the caliphs of Bagdad, rulers of that powerful Arabic state, something of whose romance and mystery the book of the *Arabian Nights* has preserved for future generations forever. In their warfare with the Persians and Romans the early Arabic leaders had become aware of the advantages of systematic communication, such as those countries possessed, and they proceeded to appropriate the idea.

The great Caliph Moawiyah, who died in 675 or 680, while Damascus was still the capital, is regarded as the founder of the Arabic posts. Under Abd-el-Malek (685-705) all the important towns of the country were connected by post routes, over which dauntless horsemen on magnificent Arabian steeds sped like flashes of light. In the reign of Caliph Motamid (870-892) a postal guide, the first on record, was actually issued—or, as it might be called, a Blue Book of the roads. Its compiler was Ibu Khordadpeh, chief postmaster of an important province. He listed nine hundred and thirty post stations in the country, most of them situated on the six great high roads running out of Bagdad. The caliph's postmen rode from the Indus, Tartary and the Caspian Sea to the borders of Egypt and the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. There is magic in the names of the old towns they visited—Naishapur (the home of Omar Khayyam), Hamadan, Tiflis, Samarcand, Basra, Shiraz, Aleppo, Antioch, Damascus, Mecca, Aden. The central post office for Arabia proper was at Omra, three days' journey from Mecca.

For a long time Egypt was a dependent province of the



Plate from Paul Gerhard Heurgren, Stockholm

POSTMEN OF OLD JAPAN

From a painting on silk presented to the Reichspostmuseum, Berlin

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caliphate; then it became independent, and even acquired some of the caliph's territory. Its sultans established new post routes of their own; first using runners, then, as the routes lengthened, mounting the men on camels, and finally under Sultan Beibars (1260-1277), using relays of horses. The organization eventually became so large that it sometimes conveyed military detachments, or a provincial governor and his whole suite. When the Mongols invaded the country, in 1271, Beibars was at Damascus, where he had his residence. He sent a dispatch, calling out his Egyptian cavalry, and the courier rode from Damascus to Cairo, over four hundred and fifty miles, in sixty hours. Beibars himself rode over the post lines, disguised as a messenger, now and then, to see if the work was being properly carried on. There is a story of a long journey which he made thus while supposed to be ill in his tent. He was rudely treated at several stations, was furnished poor horses as well as insufficient feed and water in some places, and saw other abuses which brought dire and doleful reactions down upon the post station masters.

These Egyptian post couriers were chosen from among men of such intelligence that they were able to remember verbal messages of considerable length. They wore a sort of badge, a silver or copper plate fully as big as one's hand, bearing on one side the title of the reigning sultan and on the other a quotation from the Koran, beginning, "There is no God but God, and Mahomet is his prophet." This badge fastened a scarf of yellow silk, which passed thence around the courier's neck, the ends hanging down his back. This insignia, which is claimed to have originated as early as the eleventh century, represents probably the first postal badge, as well as a very early attempt to provide the messenger with a uniform.

Meanwhile, alongside the Egyptian sultanate, the Ottoman Empire had begun to spring up, driving the Arabs back

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into their southerly peninsula and becoming one of the great powers of the later Middle Ages and even of early modern times. Here, too, a fine dispatch system was a feature of the governmental organization. But the Ottoman Empire, like Egypt and China, fell upon evil days, and its great post system decayed with it.

All of these Moslem governments used carrier pigeons whose feats were considered marvelous by the European nations. Many romantic stories are told of the work of the Saracen pigeons during the crusades.

The Arabic word for post was *baryd*, said to be derived from the Persian word, *buryda* (cut off), because the tails of the post horses and mules were bobbed in a peculiar manner to distinguish them from others. The fashion spread to Europe, and even in the middle of the nineteenth century French post horses and some others were still to be seen with their tails cropped in the old oriental way.

Before the recent Great War, six of the leading European powers maintained their own post offices in Constantinople with branches in a few other large cities of the Turkish Empire. The Turks likewise had their own postal system, such as it was. There were only about one-seventh as many post offices per thousand inhabitants as there are in the United States, but the number was probably adequate. All foreign post offices were eliminated from Turkey by the Lausanne treaties, and latest reports show that Turkey is now building up a much better postal service than she ever had before—is even beginning in a small way to send mail through the air!

CHAPTER V

A REMARKABLE FAMILY OF POSTMEN

Thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest.

MILTON

HISTORIANS obsessed by war and politics are often guilty of unfortunate oversights. There was, for example, in Europe, a noble family whose men for more than half a thousand years were important factors in the economic and social progress of the continent, and yet who have been strangely ignored by writers of history. That family was the house of Thurn and Taxis, who built up the greatest group of postal systems that Europe had yet known; who played a large part in the development of communication between and through half a dozen countries of Europe, and likewise in bringing about postal facilities for the public.

The family originated in Bergamo, in Italy, where their name originally was Tassis or Tasso. Torquato Tasso, the poet, is said to have been of the same stock. From very early times the Tassi were keenly interested in methods of communication; and, by the way, messenger service in Italy is of considerable antiquity, though the romantic claim that the Italian postal system has descended in an unbroken line from the *Cursus publicus* of Rome is undemonstrable, to say the least of it.

One hears in the thirteenth century of the corporation of the Bergamascan Couriers, who were organized by Omodeo Tasso, and who, after 1290, were found in many parts of Italy. The early messenger service in that country was somewhat similar to that of the Teutonic Knights. The

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turbulent condition of medieval Italy made it a troublesome and dangerous thing to be a dispatch bearer. Thomas Garzonus, the Italian writer, in his *Piazza Universale*, speaks of "the great hardships messengers had to undergo at the hands of banditti, robbers, ruffians, murderers, also owing to floods, broken bridges, storms, rain, mud, heat, cold, snow, wind. . . . In times of war and pestilence the messengers experience the greatest difficulties, inasmuch as they are prevented from proceeding on their journey, being stopped everywhere, the letters and money are taken from them, they get beaten and suffer from many other similar misfortunes." And, by the way, Italy was not the only country in which the messengers had their troubles.

In the fifteenth century the great family of postal enthusiasts is found mentioned as de Tour et Tassis, though there are claims that their supplementary name was really Torriani. There are many conflicting statements regarding their early doings in postal history. For example, Roger de Tour et Tassis is said to have established a courier service across Tyrol and Styria about the middle of the fifteenth century; but there are some investigators who doubt this. It is certain, however, that Roger went over to Austria and entered the service, as Chamberlain and Chief Master of the Huntsmen, of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III (1440-1493), who established the first post stations in the empire. One reason for Frederick's desire for better communication was the menace of the Turks, who were then continually threatening central Europe.

Roger was a great favorite with the emperor, but evidently his two names had too soft, too liquid and Mediterranean a sound for his new and very Teutonic lord, and we therefore find the names presently Germanized into Thurn and Taxis. The old cognomen, however, was commemorated in a picturesque way. For centuries thereafter

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on the Continent, it was the custom to place a piece of badger skin (*pelle di tasso*) across the foreheads of post horses.

The name of Francis von Taxis, son of Roger and perhaps the most famous of the family, is first discovered in a postrider register of the year 1491 preserved in the archives at Innsbruck, in the Tyrol. In this book also occurs the name of Francis's brother, Johannes Dax, Chief Postmaster of Maximilian I (Holy Roman Emperor from 1493 to 1519), and ancestor of a branch of the Taxis family which later settled at Augsburg. Gabriel von Taxis, an uncle of Francis, held the position of postmaster at Innsbruck for several years after 1500.

On March 1, 1500, Francis von Taxis was appointed at Ghent "Captain and Master of Our Posts" by Philip I, "The Handsome," son of the Emperor Maximilian and himself a considerable figure in the Who's Who of the period, being listed as king respectively of Castile, Leon and Granada. Archduke of Austria and Duke of Burgundy, Lorraine and Brabant—which means that he was ruler of the Netherlands.

Francis evidently gave satisfaction, for in January, 1505, Philip signed a new contract with him, whereby, for a yearly consideration of twelve thousand livres, von Taxis was to establish and maintain mounted courier service between Brussels, the governmental headquarters for the Low Countries, the court of Maximilian I, the French capital and Philip's own court in Spain. Francis undertook to carry letters from Brussels to Innsbruck in five and one-half days in summer and six and one-half in winter. He agreed to install a forty-four-hour service between Brussels and Paris, four days from Brussels to Lyons, twelve days to Toledo and fifteen to Granada.

Francis von Taxis was the sort of man for whom governments and great corporations of modern times are seeking as an executive. He might, of course, be scathingly criti-

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cized to-day for nepotism, for he took into his service his several brothers, Johann, Gabriel, Roger, Leonard, David and Simon, to say nothing of a few nephews, cousins, uncles and aunts. Simon was, in fact, designated as *Correo Mayor* or Chief Postmaster of Spain by Philip, though the probabilities are that he had not much of an organization under him. But such things were common in those days; and besides, the system functioned efficiently under family management, so why cavil at it?

Francis's post service ran according to schedule, but the royal treasury presently found it impossible to pay the yearly stipend due him. The resourceful postman did not abandon his project for a small matter like that; he simply demanded that he be permitted to carry passengers and private letters in order to reimburse himself; and this privilege was granted him, provided that he did not allow it to interfere with the speed of the royal dispatches. Here, then, at the point where the public was given its first real mail service, should be placed one of the milestones of postal history.

Philip died but little more than a year after the signing of the contract, and Francis carried on under the government of Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Savoy. In 1512 the Emperor Maximilian conferred upon Francis, as well as upon his brothers Roger, Leonard and Johann and upon Roger's sons, Johann Baptista, David, Maphe and Simon, titles of hereditary nobility in the empire and in the Austrian and Burgundian dominions, likewise making them count palsgraves. The Order of the Golden Spur was conferred upon Francis alone. In further recognition of the distinguished services of Francis, Johann, Leonard and Baptista, the emperor changed their armorial bearings, adding thereto a golden horn of the coiled type which had begun to be carried by postriders to herald their approach at a station, or when meeting less important travelers on the road. From

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that day to this the post horn has appeared as a symbol in the insignia of nearly all the mail systems of Europe.

In 1516 the contract of Francis ran out, and he, together



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From "Posten I Forntid och Nutid," by Paul Gerhard Heurgren

THE EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN SENDING HIS LETTERS BY THE THURN AND TAXIS POST

with his nephew, Johann Baptista, who are designated as the King's Chief Postmasters, concluded a new arrangement with King Charles I of Spain, who later became one of the greatest of the Holy Roman Emperors. By this agreement

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the Thurn and Taxis post lines were extended to Verona, Rome and Naples. At the same time Francis was commissioned by the Emperor Maximilian to set up the post line which became his most famous—that between Brussels and Maximilian's court at Vienna, passing through Kreuznach, Speyer, Cannstatt and Augsburg. This was the beginning of the great Imperial Post of later centuries. Von Taxis resided in Belgium, and administered his rapidly growing business from his office in Brussels.

Only a year after receiving his new contract, Francis, Count von Thurn and Taxis, died without heirs, and the direction of his postal organization passed to Johann Baptista, his nephew. In an old tapestry still preserved in Europe is the only contemporary portrait of the founder of the Imperial Posts. The tapestry represents, in three episodes, the coming of the wonder-working image of Notre-Dame des Sablons to Brussels. In each picture von Taxis appears, a noble-looking white-haired man with shaven face, holding his hat in one hand and in the other a letter with a seal hanging from it.

Johann Baptista at once received from King Charles of Spain the promise of the chief postmastership in all his dominions, Maphe and Simon being coupled with him in this grant; and thus the family became firmly implanted in Spain also. In 1519 Maximilian died, and Charles was elected to the throne of the empire as Charles V. It was Johann Baptista von Taxis himself who rode as courier to the court at Brussels, bearing the news of Charles's election.

Leonard, the successor of Johann, extended the system, and in 1543 was appointed by Charles postmaster of the whole empire, a formal dignity which the family had not until then attained.

In 1522, when the Turkish Sultan Solyman was threatening Vienna, the sittings of the Diet were removed from there to Nuremberg, and von Taxis established a new line between

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those two cities. Soon afterwards he extended his service to Hamburg and other places. But now some rather bitter opposition was arising. The German states and cities, many of which had their own couriers, were jealous of the Thurn and Taxis family, some calling them Italians, others calling their organization a Spanish-Netherlandish affair, with sneering reference to the Emperor Charles and his Spanish posts. There were now many private messenger lines besides those of the Hanse towns. The city of Vienna had, as early as 1360, a special messenger room in the town hall which none save the provincial messengers were allowed to enter. These couriers carried not only the official letters of the town council to the ducal courts of Neustadt and Gratz, but also letters and small parcels for the merchants. Other cities had important organizations. Strasbourg is known to have issued a messenger code as early as 1443. Silesia was a center of messenger service, and a small house near the town hall in Breslau was assigned for the use of the sworn collector of letters—the *Botenknecht*, or messenger-servant, as he was called. This may be regarded as one of the first of the post offices.

All over central Europe private and municipal letter-carrying lines were being promoted. Some of the most efficient were those of Switzerland. The busy little city of St. Gall, for example, even in the fourteenth century, was maintaining close relations with Nuremberg, in Germany, which, by the way, because of its enterprise and its advantageous position, was called "the center of Europe." The post of St. Gall was organized by the city merchants, who shared the expense of conducting it—and in that mountainous country, where wheeled vehicles were as yet unheard-of and impossible, costs were high. The St. Gall couriers were not only postmen but freighters. Groups of them escorted long pack trains of horses and mules through the tortuous defiles of the Alps and the Juras, carrying German linen, fine cloths from

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the Levant, spices from the Far East, lace and embroidery from Flanders, jewelry, gold and silver packed in iron-bound barrels, sometimes carrying passengers or accompanied by pilgrims on foot. In charge of the train was an official city messenger, wearing not only a badge but the city arms and colors embroidered on his coat, and provided with a passport recommending him to the protection of God and the authorities and private individuals along the line.

As the journeys became regularly periodical, the guilds of different towns along the routes began to agree to share the expense. At first the St. Gall couriers went only to Nuremberg and Lyons. Then they began receiving and delivering letters for towns a little off their route, such as Berne and Basel. But their service was so highly regarded that the merchants of Augsburg, Ulm and Biberach presently asked permission to use it on payment of a yearly fee. Schaffhausen, Geneva and other Swiss towns also established highly efficient messenger systems.

In the Austrian hereditary dominions, King Mathias Corvinus of Hungary, who died in 1490, organized a crude dispatch service, and a little more than a century later another King Mathias set up a post system in Bohemia and Moravia. He also attempted in 1612 to establish posts in Silesia, but was forestalled by the Emperor Ferdinand, who started a line between Vienna and Breslau. But Breslau carried on a considerable business with Leipzig, which led the Silesian government in 1650 to organize postal communication between the two cities by mounted messengers.

One runs across many curious contrivances in those hodgepodge times. In the Archbishopric of Salzburg, the prelate himself organized the postal service and established twelve stations for mounted and vehicle messengers. In 1665 this right was confirmed to the archbishop by the Emperor Leopold, and so it remained until the nineteenth century—the

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archbishopric being "secularized" in 1802 and formally annexed to Austria in 1814.

Another quaint institution was the "butcher post." As already mentioned, the butchers in Germany traveled rather widely in their cattle buying, and being regarded as men of substance and responsibility, they were given many letters to carry. In the course of time the Butchers' Guild formed a regular postal organization. A patent of the Emperor Rudolf II in 1597 mentions the butcher post as an established institution to promote communication. Even in 1622, after the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, a special Post and Butcher Regulation issued by Duke Johann Friedrich of Wurttemberg shows that in remote localities where there was no regular mail service the butchers were still in the habit of carrying letter bags; and that in such districts they were also expected to supply the means of conveying travelers, which was now considered one of the functions of the mail service. The time of the butcher's departure was even fixed by the local prefect or the postmaster, and it was said that the butcher sometimes had to wait an annoying while before he received leave to depart. For a long time these German butchers had been in the habit of carrying a bugle with which to announce their arrival to buy cattle, and this now became in some sense a post horn. Even in the nineteenth century the butchers' guilds often had a bugle in their coats of arms. In Wurttemberg they continued to use the bugle until the end of the seventeenth century, and the Thurn and Taxis officials frequently complained bitterly of the butchers using what they called the "post horn."

There was even a private messenger service for the letters of one man, so we are told. Erasmus, the great Dutch theological and classical scholar of the first half of the sixteenth century, wrote more letters than any man had ever done up to that time. Among his correspondents were kings, popes, cardinals, bishops, princes and nobles, the great and the

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learned all over the civilized world. A number of young men, protégés of his whom he called *formuli*, were sent on horseback in various directions at certain times of the year with bags full of letters, to return a few weeks or months later, laden with reply letters, old manuscripts, documents, books and other gifts from the great man's notable correspondents.

There were royal dispatch lines started in the empire, too, which were not under the Thurn and Taxis emblem—one from Vienna to Pressburg, for example, and one from Vienna to Prague, which had daily service, but only for governmental use. The emperor's deed of appointment to the office of postmaster-general given to Leonard von Taxis in 1543 specified that the right was given only "without prejudice to the management and appointment in this Post which We Ourselves pay for and maintain."

When the strong hand of Charles V laid down the imperial scepter many cities and German states refused to admit the Thurn and Taxis post to their territory. Nevertheless, the Emperor Ferdinand I confirmed Leonard as postmaster-general in 1563, and the latter went serenely on his way, overcoming a considerable portion of the opposition. In 1595 Emperor Rudolf II again confirmed him, but the imperial lines mentioned above were also in operation and being extended, their business centering in an office in Vienna which was called the Chief Court Post Office. The von Paar family eventually became the postmasters of this service and passed it from father to son in all the hereditary dominions of Austria save Silesia and the Netherlands until 1720. In that year the Emperor Charles VI declared the postal service a state monopoly, but left the management in the hands of the von Paars for two years, after which they gave up all save a small percentage of the revenue.

In 1615 Lamoral von Taxis was actually enfeoffed with the Imperial Post, and the family thereafter held it as an

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imperial fief, that is, an estate given to a subject for services rendered. In return von Taxis again agreed to hold no prejudice against the court posts. But in the same document the emperor decreed the suppression of the butcher and private messenger services, which immediately aroused a storm of opposition from princes, imperial estates and cities, over many of which the emperor had little real authority.

A postal service could be introduced into a German state only by permission of its ruler. The Elector of Brandenburg was one of the notable opponents of von Taxis. He was determined to retain his state postal service, while von Taxis was equally insistent upon getting possession of so important a business. A bitter struggle of many years' duration ensued, but in spite of the emperor's assistance to von Taxis the Elector won. The Great Elector, Frederick William (1640-1688), extended the service to Prussia when he secured full possession of that province. Thus was founded the Prussian postal service, which differed from most others, in that from the very first it transported passengers and goods as well as letters, and from all others in that it ran by night as well as by day. The Great Elector in a letter to the emperor in 1652 boasted that his own postal service "is performed with such careful diligence and zeal that all other posts are thereby encouraged to effect their own conveyance with like care and rapidity." The service was further improved in 1686 when the elector dispatched a division to aid the emperor against the Turks, and received the name of *Hocheilende Post* (accelerated post). In 1694 the elector proposed to establish direct connection between his own posts to Hamburg and Cleves and that from Vienna, and thus cut in upon the Taxis business. After much discussion and much opposition from the Taxis organization this was put through.

But to go back to the beginning of the century and to other portions of the empire, many cities and corporations

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continued to operate their own messenger lines, in spite of the emperor's decree; and this might have caused serious conflicts had not a greater calamity supervened. In 1618 the long and increasing friction between Catholics and Protestants in the empire finally brought on a burst of flame which signaled the beginning of the dreadful Thirty Years' War. During its first few years, before the fighting became so widespread, most of the post systems carried on without great interruption; but when all the Teutonic countries of Europe and some of their neighbors became involved the mails suffered severely. The brutality of some of the fighting and pillage was scarcely exceeded in the Dark Ages. Not only the irregular bands, who operated entirely for themselves, making a pretended adherence to one side or another merely to justify murder and loot, but also the ruffianly regular soldiery made short work of any messengers who fell into their hands, and with little fear of punishment. The unfortunate courier was invariably stripped, not only of his letter bag, but also of his horse, trappings, weapons and even his clothes, and was fortunate if he escaped with his life. The station keepers, or postmasters, as they had begun to be called, were continually preyed upon by the irregular soldiery, especially if they were in rural districts. Even as in present-day Latin-American countries in troubled periods, roving bands settled down upon the post stations, ate all the provisions, carried off the horses, cattle and feed, and even if they did not indulge in wholesale murder, at least drove the unfortunate man to beggary.

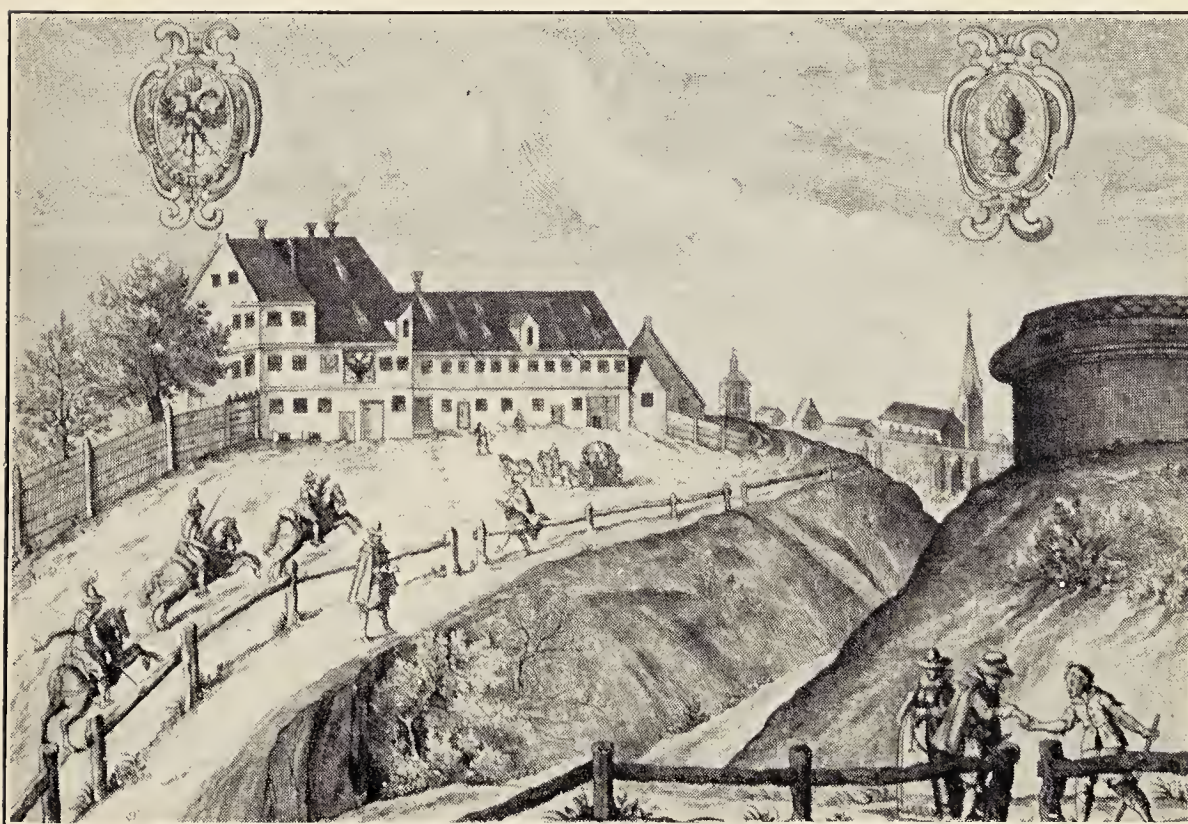
But, strangely enough, the posts in Germany were not destroyed, but managed to keep going somehow. The true stories of how officials and messengers planned detours to avoid armies, of how the word was passed to and fro as to which roads were open, and where John Tzerclas or some other guerilla chieftain had last been seen with his band, of how the couriers hid in forests and copses as the soldiers



GERMAN COURIER, FIFTEENTH
CENTURY



SIGN TORN BY SAXONS FROM
THURN AND TAXIS POST
HOUSE, QUEDLINBURG, 1686



Old Print in Reichspostmuseum, Berlin

THURN AND TAXIS POST OFFICE AT AUGSBURG, SIXTEENTH CENTURY

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rode by, pressing their horses' nostrils shut lest a whinny betray their presence, of how postmen galloped in flight until their horses fell dead under them, sank their bags in deep pools, even hid under water themselves—in all this is the material of romantic adventure as thrilling as any that Stanley Weyman or Sabatini ever wrote.

Though certain lines were frequently stopped for weeks and months, they always resumed again when the troops had retired from that portion of the country. Their extraordinary persistence in the face of conditions of which we in America can have no conception proved that postal communication was becoming more and more a necessity to the life of the people.

When Sweden entered the war in 1630, and Gustavus Adolphus with his army swept across Germany, he suppressed the imperial posts wherever he found them, and set up Swedish post offices. These he put under the superintendency of Johann von der Birghden, former postmaster at Frankfort-on-the-Main, who had been dismissed from that position by Leonard Taxis II in 1627, and who afterwards had a long lawsuit with Taxis, during which he testified that Count Leonard once told him that the Imperial Post yielded a revenue of one hundred thousand ducats yearly, for "it was one of those wells into which all streams flow."

When the peace commissioners began sitting, first at Münster and then at Osnabrück, in 1648, the various ambassadors and commissioners found it necessary to have quick and sure communication with their home governments, and stern orders were at once broadcast, threatening death to any one who interfered with any messengers. Thus communication was rather quickly restored.

Meanwhile the Thurn and Taxis post continued to have its troubles with state and municipal competition. In the Postal Museum at Berlin is a mute witness to one of these affairs, an old signboard bearing the words, *Keyserliche Post*, which,

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until 1686 marked the Thurn and Taxis post office at Quedlinburg, in Saxony. That year the Saxon government demanded the suppression of the imperial posts in Thuringia, and the removal of the posthouse from Quedlinburg. "Saxon horsemen," says a chronicler, "rode forth from Quedlinburg to meet the Taxis post-rider, cut his saddlebags from the horse, and tore down the postal signboard from the Taxis post-office." This old board plainly shows on its back the marks of its violent removal from the post-office wall.

In Belgium the postal disorders almost reached the pitch of civil war. Numerous private messenger agencies had established themselves in the Low Countries towards the end of the sixteenth century. They were to some extent protected by the authorities of the towns out of which they worked, which places later on claimed the right to appoint the messengers. Thus these city messengers gradually took on the character of a public institution. Belgium, because of its intensive industry and commerce, was the richest country in Europe; and the Imperial Post, early in its history, had turned this to its own advantage by admitting private letters for foreign parts to what had first been organized solely as a governmental agency of communication.

Brussels, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, had sworn messengers who traveled to Cologne, Lille, Dunkirk, Valenciennes and all the larger towns of Belgium. All other towns of any consequence in the Netherlands had messengers of their own, appointed by the local authorities. Some of the less prosperous and those with shorter routes traveled on foot; others went on horseback, by vehicle, canal boat or ship. They carried letters, parcels and money, and also transmitted verbal messages. As time went on, they arranged a system of exchange among themselves for those articles which could reach their destination only through several hands. Oddly enough, however, a messenger could

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accept communications for no towns along his own route save those to which he was licensed to travel. Thus the Antwerp-Mechlin-Namur carrier was not permitted to accept letters for Brussels or Wavre, though he passed through both of those towns en route. Another man would carry the Brussels-Namur letters, another the Brussels-Wavre, and so on. Each messenger had affixed beside the door of his house a letter box, on which the names of his termini were printed. Between important towns rival messengers operated; in 1638 there were twelve competing for the business between Brussels and Antwerp.

The Imperial Post made repeated efforts to obtain some of this business, but the cities resisted stoutly any interference with their concessionaires. In 1656 Antwerp even proposed that the Thurn and Taxis post be suppressed. No attention was paid to this suggestion, and in 1657 Antwerp forcibly took possession of the mail service to Holland, stopping the government carriers and seizing their mails—which they sent the rest of the way by communal messengers established between Antwerp and Amsterdam. Thus began a conflict which raged intermittently during more than a hundred years. The authorities of Brabant brought a civil suit against Antwerp and won it, the city messengers being prohibited from interfering with the Imperial Post on pain of heavy fines. But Antwerp continued to stop the government mails and handle them herself. When state officers of justice tried to arrest the messengers, the masters of the guilds, supported by a mob, resisted and put them to flight. In 1659 the messengers and those guild masters who had refused to appear in court were sent into banishment. Thereupon a mob collected, beat the civic guard, insulted the magistrate, maltreated other officials and wrecked the burgo-master's house. The magistrate was thereby bullied into rescinding his sentence of banishment.

The Council of Brabant now recommended to the govern-

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ment that troops be sent to put an end to this queer little war; and on October 17, 1659, a small army accordingly appeared before Antwerp. The terrified guild masters promptly apologized, gave promise that the decrees should be carried out, and undertook to restore order and make good the damage. Seven ringleaders of the mob were arrested, of whom five were hanged and two pardoned.

The rebellion was supposedly quelled, but Antwerp burghers were still bitter against the royal post, and only a show of force prevented their suppressing it in their own vicinity. Their hatred was aggravated by the fact that the Taxis couriers, in spite of court decision and royal decrees, trespassed upon the city messenger service and carried domestic letters.

Meanwhile, in 1678, in their war on the Netherlands, when the French captured Ghent and the adjoining country, they took over the Taxis and other posts, and set up a system of their own; but the Peace of Nijmegen shortly afterwards eliminated them again. At the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession, the French once more invaded Belgium, and again took portions of the Thurn and Taxis post under their control. For a long time after peace was declared, the Taxis authorities could not regain possession of their rights. Not until 1725 did Count Anselm Franz von Taxis recover the Belgian posts, and then only by agreeing to pay a yearly sum of eighty thousand gulden of Brabant. By decree of Emperor Charles VI (for Belgium was still under Austrian rule) in 1729, this was raised to one hundred and twenty-five thousand gulden. The Empress Maria Theresa in 1753 extended the Thurn and Taxis contract by twenty years, but raised the annual rate to one hundred and thirty-five thousand gulden.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, Taxis finally gained legal authority to handle domestic letters; but still the city messengers were not abolished. But presently the

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post was made an imperial monopoly, and postal officers were empowered to search stage coaches—with the exception of passengers' private luggage—both on their entering and leaving the country, for fraudulently conveyed letters. If any such were found, the guards were fined twenty-five florins per letter.

As may be imagined, this did not alleviate the bitterness in Belgium. A law suggested by von Taxis and passed in 1738, further restraining the city messengers, again aroused a storm, and Antwerp and other cities refused to promulgate it. The government thereupon declared that the postal right had always been vested in the state. This led to acts of open violence against the state postmen. Under pretense of making search for dutiable articles, they were arrested and manhandled by local authorities, their letter parcels, even mails to and from France and England, were torn open, and coach cushions were frequently cut by bayonet thrusts. The couriers were often detained for days. The horse and cart of one was seized because he had tried to smuggle a small packet of ribbon. Again and again the culprits in these cases were punished, but customs officers, instigated by higher officials, continued under pretext of search to insult and beat postilions so that several left the service.

In 1767 and 1769 new laws were passed by which the messengers were in some degree compensated for their lost privileges, and the testy little country cooled down a bit. The empress by proclamation still forbade the city messengers to use the post horn or to carry letters for any other than their regular beat. They could have only one mail box each, affixed to their house or lodging, and it must have marked on it only the name of the town to which they went.

During the War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748, the French once more seized the Netherlands posts; but the

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high respect in which the mail was held by the governments of that day is indicated by the fact that both Louis XV and Maria Theresa ordered that postal service should not be interrupted by the armies, and that protection and assistance were to be given even to postilions and carriers employed by an enemy government. After the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle the Counts von Taxis once more regained their lines.

Early in the seventeenth century the Emperor Mathias had also bestowed upon the Taxis family the office of Chief Court Postmaster of the Royal Hungarian Posts, which were independent of the imperial service. Later the Hungarian concession was taken away from von Taxis and in 1612 was given to one Charles Magni, who in 1615 also received the appointment of Chief Court Postmaster of Austria. From that time forward these two institutions remained separate from the Taxis or Imperial Post. There were frequent conflicts between them regarding what were elegantly called the *emolumenta* and the right to carry certain letters.

In Tyrol and other countries of lower Austria minor branches of the Taxis family are found as post controllers. Not until 1769 was the postal service in those provinces purchased from the Taxis heirs for twenty thousand florins.

Let us now go back to the Latin organizations of Taxis or Tassis family. Under the Holy Roman Empire they secured control of the main post lines in Italy, where they themselves originated, and entire control in Spain. Simon von Taxis, brother of the great Francis, was made correo mayor (postmaster-general) of Spain, and was succeeded by his brothers and sons. As in Austria the family name, chameleon-like, began to take on the color of its surroundings. The family had operated in Spain less than fifty years when one finds the incumbent's name to be Don Juan de Taxis y Acunha. Even so an Irish soldier of fortune drifts to South America, quite naturally becomes involved in a revolution, and emerges Don Ambrosio O'Higgins, dictator.

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Don Juan de Taxis was the son of Raymond, who transferred the Spanish monopoly to him, retaining for himself the posts of Italy. The family name was gradually built up until the middle of the seventeenth century when the head of the house appears as Don Inigo Venez Ladron de Guevara y Taxis; and probably as pronounced in Spain, even the word Taxis would have been unrecognizable by the German cousins.

The Taxis correos in Spain established some great international lines; one of them, called the "Ordinary," begun in 1580, which carried correspondence between the Spanish court and Genoa, Milan, Rome and Naples. An Italian postal guide in 1676 says, "It was Raimund de Tassi in Spain and his cousin Antonius in Rome who dispatched a regular courier from Rome to the all-powerful Catholic King, and from there, once a month, to Rome." During the French wars of Henry III and IV (1574-1610), this regular courier ceased to be sent by land, going by sea instead between Genoa and Barcelona, though there was also danger that way from pirates. When peace was restored, the old route was resumed via Lyons, Limoges, Bayonne, Irun, Vittoria and Burgos. Dispatches for France were left at Lyons. Under Roger Tassi in the seventeenth century the Italian mails were accelerated so that letters passed between Rome and Venice in less than two days.

In 1676 there was even a Spanish post office in Rome. The postal guide of that year says, "On Saturday evenings an ordinary courier is despatched from the Spanish post-office. He rides via Viterbo, Siena, Florence, Bologna, Modena to Mantua." There the mails for Germany and Flanders were dropped, and went via Trieste and Innsbruck to Augsburg, where they were spread out over the Rhine valley, down to Antwerp, and in the other direction to Pilsen and Prague. The courier proceeded from Mantua via Cremona and Milan.

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But the Taxis correos mayores had no easy job of it in Spain. Being aliens and regarded by many as selfish and unscrupulous promoters, they were fought bitterly by the provinces, cities and brotherhoods, almost all of whom had their own little post lines, and so for many years they did not get their share of the local business. Not until 1696 did the correo mayor, then Count Onate de Taxis, succeed



HEADING OF SWEDISH NEWS-
PAPER,
"POST TIDENDER," 1714

in gaining complete control of the mail service of the kingdom.

In 1601 occurred the first recorded international postal convention, when Don Juan de Taxis, the correo mayor, and G. Fouquet de la Varane, intendant of the posts of France, met and made provisions for better mail facilities between their two countries. In the seventeenth century also, Spain established regular postal service with England, Holland and Germany, the mails being dispatched to those countries every fortnight. The War of the Spanish Succession and the straitened condition of his treasury caused King Philip V of

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Spain to bring the post system directly into the government's hands in 1706, a large compensation being given to the Taxis family for the loss of their monopoly.

It was in Germany during the Taxis incumbency, and in close connection with the postal service that the modern newspaper had its birth. Of course the Chinese were the first in journalism as in everything else, it seems. The "Peking Gazette," as we foreigners call it, though that is not quite its Chinese name, containing imperial rescripts and official news, was published continuously from the time of the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-905) until the twentieth century; but of course it was not a newspaper of the sort that we Occidentals have now.

Pamphlets recording certain current happenings were occasionally published in Europe as far back as 1462. In Germany hundreds of such pamphlets were published before 1610, but none of them are known to have been issued in a series. This claim is made for one which first appeared about 1600, consisting of written notices and news items, distributed through the post, but there is no definite information on the subject.

So far as known, the earliest undeniably periodical publication giving "news of the day" was the *Frankfurter Journal*, a weekly, started by Egenolph Emmel, a bookseller, in 1615. Almost at the same time a large sheet called the *Oberpostamts-Zeitung* was issued by the Imperial Administrator of Posts at Frankfort-am-Main, Johann von der Birghden. A newspaper in Antwerp followed in 1616, and the *Fuldaische Postreiter* (postrider) in 1618. Note how the word "post" became essentially connected with newspapers from the very start. The names of the numerous papers founded in the years that immediately followed, *Post*, *Post Rider*, *Postillion*, *Post News*, *Post Tidings*, *The Old Postmaster*, and so on, give a hint of the fact that they were not only distributed by post, but that because of this arrangement, the

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postmasters were most frequently the publishers. In fact, the fathering of newspapers by postmasters was so regular a thing that the business came to be regarded as well-nigh a prerogative of the postal service. Emperor Ferdinand II settled a dispute over newspaper printing in Frankfort in 1628 by ruling that no one should print a paper there unless authorized by Count Thurn and Taxis. When another presumptuous person in Hamburg dared to issue a newspaper in 1636, the emperor again decreed that no one in that city might publish save the Thurn and Taxis postmaster or his agent or concessionaire.

CHAPTER VI

FRANCE AND THE FIRST CITY MAIL SERVICE

The Post is the link connecting all affairs, all negotiations; by its means the absent becomes present; it is the consolation of life.

VOLTAIRE

FRANCE, not being a part of the Holy Roman Empire, was never seriously invaded by the Thurn and Taxis posts, though the couriers of those great promoters crossed portions of its territory in the sixteenth century. Neither did communal messenger service gain any foothold in France. The government was strongly centralized; there were no "free cities" there, no small, semi-independent states as in Germany. But neither were the people of France given the use of the posts for their private letters until long after many folk in Germany had begun to enjoy that privilege. The iron hand of Louis XI had created a powerful governmental courier service, and for more than a century and a half it continued to function almost solely for the crown, save in the matter of carrying passengers. It is true that individuals were theoretically entitled to the use of the posts for their letters, but under such restricted conditions and at such high rates that no one save very wealthy merchants or the nobility could afford to use it.

The royal messenger service was considerably extended by Charles IX, and again improved by Henry IV in 1603; but not until the reign of Louis XIII did the public begin to enjoy its benefits. This great improvement is to be credited not to the king but rather to the wisdom of his great minister, Cardinal Richelieu. In 1621 Richelieu selected Pierre d'Al-

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méras, a man of high birth and integrity, as Général des Postes; and it was under his direction that the people began—in a limited way, to be sure—to enjoy their first mail service. D'Alméras is said to have sunk one hundred thousand dollars of his own money in his service of the state.

The country was divided into postal districts, and the mail was carried by *courriers* or runners, who went on foot or on horseback, by land or water, as best they could. In 1627 D'Alméras designed a moderate-cost registration system for letters which made it possible to send money by mail—the first regular arrangement of its kind. He must have installed a parcel post system also, for the prime minister Mazarin's edict at the commencement of Louis XIV's reign in 1643 shows that it was then in existence.

Mazarin directed the appointment for each head post office throughout the kingdom of a comptroller, a weigher and an assessor, and instead of paying them by salary, he raised the existing letter and parcels rates by twenty-five per cent, which surcharge was to be divided among the three men as their compensation. This was an incitement to increase the business of the post office by giving good service, and even by solicitation.

The turmoils of the Fronde, a little civil war between the parliamentary and court parties which came on in 1648 as a sort of reflection of the rebellion then going on against Charles I in England and continued for four years, almost wrecked the postal service. Mazarin was driven from power during the trouble, but returned immediately after its cessation, and set about reorganizing the mail lines.

It must be remembered that up to this time no post system in history had ever considered the possibility of a house-to-house delivery in either city or country. One went to the post office to send one's letters, and to receive them, too, if any came. But in 1653 one M. Velayr proposed to estab-

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lish a city mail service—a *petite poste*, as it was promptly named—for Paris, and was granted a royal privilege to do so. This scheme concerned itself primarily with letters going from point to point inside the city, a service hitherto performed by servants or casual messengers. The town was so large that one's Mercury might easily occupy the whole day in carrying a letter to a friend in a distant suburb and bringing back a reply.

Velaye scattered numerous boxes all over Paris for the reception of the letters, and to simplify the payment of their carriage he sold covers or wrappers in which the missives were to be sent, and on which a receipt for the fee, two sous, was printed. This is very logically considered to have been the first attempt at a postage stamp.

To introduce his idea to the public, Velaye distributed handbills throughout the city, in which he pointed out that "those who do not keep valets; those whose servants are ill; those who are obliged to keep them at home, and further, those who wish to save them trouble; those who have servants who are not acquainted with the streets and the houses; those who have valets who prefer rambling about, and pretend afterwards that they could not find the persons they were sent to; those who have servants who go and see their relatives and fellow countrymen instead of doing what they were told to do, will find this institution a great convenience and assistance.

"The tradesman who cannot leave his shop lest he should miss an opportunity of selling his merchandise, the artisan who does not wish to leave his work because his time is valuable" and other middle-class folk were likewise appealed to, as well as "those who are in the service of another and cannot go out."

There are several scandalous and conflicting reports about the operation of Velaye's system. We are told that the boxes were supposed to be cleared three times daily, but gos-

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sip insists that some of them were forgotten for weeks and months; and that when they were opened mice were found to have taken up their abode therein, cut the letters into rags and made them into nests. There seems little doubt that some people stuffed garbage and refuse into the boxes—whether from malice, a perverted sense of humor or a mistaken notion that that was what the boxes were intended for, we cannot say. The charge is made that ill-disposed persons, either foes of innovation or agents of the greater post system, who feared that Velaye might grow into a serious rival, introduced not only the garbage but even the mice into the boxes with intent to damage his business. However that may be, his “little post” was not a success, and presently fell into disuse.

In 1692 another attempt was made at a city mail service, and six boxes were placed in various quarters of the town. These were emptied regularly but too infrequently, and this project failed also.

Meanwhile the University of Paris still clung to its ancient messenger service, which had now been in operation for four hundred years. Its couriers in the latter seventeenth century were traveling on horseback or in wheeled vehicles, carrying passengers, and in effect, furnishing no little competition against the state posts. Naturally, this brought on friction. From 1620, when Louis XIII farmed out certain minor messenger privileges, the university messengers were continually being called upon to show proof of their right to operate a post. When D’Alméras in 1627 issued his postal regulations, another attempt was made to hamper the university’s privilege. In 1635 the government offered the institution twelve thousand livres for its messenger rights, and raised the bid a little later to thirty thousand, but both were refused. After the Thirty Years’ War the chief intendant of the posts offered ninety thousand livres, which likewise was rejected. Evidently the franchise was a valuable one.



Rural Postman, 1875



City Postman, 1875



Postilion, 1825



Diligence Conductor, 1840

From "Histoire de la Poste de Lettres," by Arthur de Rothschild

FRENCH POSTMEN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Meanwhile the university was involved in numerous legal actions to protect its rights, and finally began to farm out some of its messenger lines.

In 1662 Louis XIV, through his minister Louvois, abolished the privileges of those post-office officials who, under Mazarin's edict, were receiving the profits of the post, and the government took entire charge of the service. Two couriers per week now left Paris on each route. The price fixed by law for sending a short letter from Paris to Bordeaux or Lyons was three sous, or less than four cents. To London a letter cost from eight to twenty sous, according to weight. There were frequent complaints of graft—that is, collection of more than the legal rate for sending letters; one specific instance being a charge of fifteen sous for sending a poem, and not a very long one, at that, from Paris to Amiens.

In 1672 Louvois decided to farm out the post service—that is, let it to a contractor—and one Lazarus Patin was the successful bidder. During that century this farming of the mail service became common practice in most of the countries of Europe. Under Patin's direction the system was soon yielding a revenue of more than a million francs yearly. In 1688, when it was farmed for the third time, the income was one million four hundred thousand francs, and, by 1695, two million francs.

That all sorts and conditions of men were still carrying letters in France as in Germany and elsewhere in the latter half of the seventeenth century is proven by a regulation of 1675 which forbids all "ex-messengers, all masters of coaches, carriages and sedan-chairs, poulterers and butter-men, mule drivers, pedestrians, mariners, coachmen, waggoners, carriers both by water and land and all other persons of whatever rank or condition" to carry letters or packets.

The speed of the mails was not greatly increased during Louis XIV's long reign. When he came to the throne in

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1643 just three weeks were required to carry a communication between Paris and Naples, and more than two weeks from Paris to Rome. Seven days was the ordinary time between Paris and London. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the pace had been bettered but little.

Special couriers of the state of course made better time. After the battle of Rocroi in 1643 a courier rode thence to Paris, probably one hundred forty miles by the route followed, in two days. In 1706, when Marlborough inflicted such a crushing defeat upon the French army at Ramillies, in Belgium, nearly two hundred miles from Paris, Saint-Simon tells us that a courier covered the distance in thirty-six hours or a little more, giving the news to King Louis at Versailles when he awoke on the second morning after the battle. But the courier knew nothing save that there had been a serious defeat. For nearly a week the king could get no information as to the details or the results of the disaster. No more couriers came, and even the posts from Belgium were stopped. Finally, after six days of worry, the king actually sent one of his ministers to the war area to get the news.

The agony of waiting, at a critical period in a war, for horse couriers to bring information from the front, the helplessness of governments at such moments, in the years before the telegraph came, is vividly pictured in the Duc de Saint-Simon's memoirs, when he describes the tension in Paris in the summer of 1708, while a French army was shut up in Lille, just after the Duc de Vendome's disgraceful defeat at Oudenarde.

The agitation in Paris [says he] was extreme. The King demanded news of the siege from his courtiers, and could not understand why no couriers arrived. It was generally expected that some decisive battle had been fought. Each day increased the uneasiness. . . . Every one at Versailles feared for the safety of a relative or friend. Prayers were offered everywhere. . . .

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Ladies who had husbands in the army stirred not from the churches. Gaming, conversation ceased. Fear was painted upon every face, and seen in every speech, without shame. If a horse passed a little quickly, everybody ran, without knowing where. The apartments of Chamillart were crowded with lackeys, even into the street, sent by people desiring to be informed of the moment that a courier arrived; and this terror and uncertainty lasted nearly a month.

In 1719 the messenger service of the University of Paris at last came to an end. The government simply took the situation by the horns and abolished the great school's privilege, assigning from the revenues of the post office three hundred thousand francs yearly to the university as partial compensation for the lost business. The university continued to draw this stipend until the Revolution put an end to all contracts and all practices of the monarchy.

Cardinal Fleury, the dynamic prime minister of Louis XV, who took up that job at the age of seventy-three and died in harness at ninety, brought about a considerable improvement in the mail service in 1728 and thereafter. The posts in France, as elsewhere in Europe at that time, suffered from many abuses. Riders were often unable to get horses at the posthouses; mails lay kicking about the stations until they were sometimes a day or two late, and were seldom properly guarded. Locks were frequently broken and the bags robbed. Often the point of delay or robbery could not be detected, as the posthouses were numerous, and the postmasters all laid the blame on each other.

Fleury did his best to effect some reforms. He made postmasters directly responsible for the loss of letters or parcels. He set guards to watch the mails from Paris to Strasbourg and on other routes where robbery was most common. A hint at the practices of the time is seen in his order that letters hereafter must be taken to the post offices for mailing, and not given to the carriers. He forecasts modern

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practice when he rules that book parcels, whether in manuscript or printed, must be left open at the ends.

One great chore which Fleury performed in behalf of postal communication was the improvement of the French roads. He did this mostly by exacting forced labor from the peasantry, incidentally arousing no little anger and discontent thereby. The development of mail service in all countries was conditioned largely upon the state of the roads; and in turn, the growing realization of the importance of such service did more for the improvement of roads than any other agency in history—until the automobile came. "Roads form the universal bond of union," says the German writer, Soden. "The degree of culture has ever been dependent upon the means of communication possessed by the nations."

In 1738 Fleury took the posts away from the contractors to put them temporarily under government control and ascertain for himself their true income. The result of his experiment was the demand of a considerably increased figure when he farmed the establishment out again. In 1786, when it was leased for the twenty-third time, it brought in ten million eight hundred thousand francs. At the expiration of the last lease in 1791, when the posts theoretically reverted to the king, but in reality to the Revolutionary government, the clear income to the state was eleven million francs.

For many decades Paris remained without a city mail delivery. In London one William Dockwra had originated such a system in 1680, and it continued in operation. In 1758, nearly eighty years later, an historical mention of Dockwra's plan fell under the eye of M. Claude Piarron de Chamousset, an enterprising and public-spirited citizen of Paris, who thus heard of the idea for the first time. He at once planned a similar post for his own city, and procured letters patent for it. Before beginning his work, he issued a pamphlet describing Dockwra's system and announcing that

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"*on pourrait*" to establish the same in all the greater capitals of Europe.

Chamousset's concession was to run twenty years. It was not strictly a monopoly, for the king decreed that people might still send their letters and packets about the city and faubourgs by whomsoever they might choose. Chamousset's rates were two sols for a single letter—that is, a single sheet—under one ounce, and three sols per ounce for packages. The postage must be paid in advance, and a small receipt for the same was affixed to the letter—probably the second instance in history of the postage stamp in its primitive form. There were nine bureaux for sending and receiving letters scattered about the city.

In the first year of his enterprise, Chamousset made a profit of fifty thousand francs. This was too juicy a plum to be left in private hands, and so in the following year the government took the business away from him, soothing him somewhat with an annual pension of twenty thousand francs for the rest of his life. Thereafter, until well into the nineteenth century, this *Petite Poste* of Paris and the *Grand Poste*, or long-distance mails, were operated separately. Each had its collection boxes in Paris. For the *Petite Poste* there were numerous "receivers" in shops and houses at street corners, where there were boxes which the carriers emptied at intervals. These carriers rushed up and down the streets from early morning until 11 A.M., and from 2 to 10 P.M., sounding a rattle (*tenebré*) which consisted of an iron handle with a wooden flapper attached, and collected many letters directly from the senders.

The enterprising city of Strasbourg set up a *petite poste* for itself in 1780, and made it so extensive that some of its routes extended fifteen and eighteen miles out from the center of town.

In 1766 twenty-seven mail coaches were leaving Paris daily for the various provinces, carrying a maximum of ten

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passengers each. A seat from Paris to Lyons at that time cost fifty francs, and ten days were required for the trip—which shows little or no improvement in speed in a century or more. Sixty years later the fare was half as high again, but the time had been reduced to three days.

Up to the time of the Revolution, when all ancient privilege was swept away, the postmasters enjoyed pleasant exemptions from certain taxes, from the quartering of soldiers upon them and from military duties by their sons. They were under the ministry of the royal household, had their commissions signed by the king and drew good salaries. For these reasons they were willing to furnish horses and vehicles for the transportation of mail, at first for three sous per pound, later for ten sous per pound, from one station to another. They likewise practiced no little extortion in the matter of assessing postage. In fact, both they and the carriers were so little to be trusted that, as M. Eugene Gallois, a historian of the service, informs us, “as crooked as a postman” came to be a common simile.

The Revolutionary government took away the fat pickings of the postmasters and put them on small annual salaries of from two hundred to four hundred francs each. Contracts were likewise abolished; and in accordance with ideas which still prevail to-day wherever communism is found, the postmaster-general and comptroller were replaced by a board of postmasters, with somewhat unhappy effect upon the service.

At the instance of the Revolutionary National Assembly, the first government post vehicles used in France were built. They were two-wheeled carts with bodies of basket work, and were furnished with a tilt or cover. A postilion in jack boots rode on a horse which was harnessed beside the two which pulled the so-called “coach.” Two or three persons could be carried besides the courier.

The French postilions of those days attracted the attention of many travelers. Theobald Wolfe Tone, the Irish patriot,

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traveling from Havre to Paris in 1796 in a private carriage, but with horses obtained from the post, thus describes his outfit: "A choice carriage lined with blue velvet; five horses; a French postilion, a most grotesque figure—cocked hat and jacket, two great wisps of straw tied on his thighs, and a pair of jack-boots, as big as two American churns." J. H. Campe, a German writer, in his book, *A Journey from Brunswick to Paris in 1789*, wrote:

The accouterment of a French postillion consists of a blue riding jacket with red facings and collar, and boots reaching almost to his waist, which are as roomy, as thick and as stiff as a wooden butter cask. It is impossible to walk with these boots on, consequently when the horses have been put to, the boots are placed beside the saddle horse, and when everything is ready the postillion with his shoes on steps into them and then hoists himself, not without great exertion, on to the horse. They have no post horn, but instead of this they have brought the art of cracking the whip to a degree of perfection scarcely attained in any other country.

But half a century later Victor Hugo seems to have found the French postilion fallen from his former eminence, at least in appearance. "Our postillions are ugly," he wrote, vexedly. "An old bespattered blouse, with a horrid cotton cap, this is the French postillion. . . . The Baden postillion is charming. He has a bright yellow jacket, a black glazed hat with broad silver braid and a small hunting horn with a large red tassel slung at his back."

When he became First Consul, Napoleon abolished the controlling board of postmasters, put the service under a postmaster-general, as it had been under the monarchy, and greatly improved it in many particulars. But the retrogression of the country because of the Revolution and of Napoleon's wars was painfully evinced by the fact that in 1814 the *gross* revenue of the post office was but little more than

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three-fifths of the *net* income of 1788, a quarter of a century before. The peaceful reign of Louis XVIII brought receipts up rapidly again, and in 1821 they reached twenty-three million francs.

It was not until 1829, under Charles X, that mail service was extended to every commune in France.

CHAPTER VII

OTHER CONTINENTAL POSTS TO THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Blow, postilion, blow your horn! Let the clattering hoofs resound!—so that Orcus may know we are coming, so that the host may be on the threshold to receive us kindly.

GOETHE.

A BIT of evidence of the close connection between the Russia of the thirteenth century and the Mongolian race is seen in the fact that the word *jam* or *yamb*, which came to signify postal service in Russia, was precisely the word used for Kublai Khan's post stations in China. Singularly enough, the first instance we have of it in Russia occurs in a decree issued by the Tartar Czar Mengu-Timur (1270-1276), almost at the very moment when Marco Polo was being introduced to the Emperor Kublai Khan, whose great posting system he admired so much. In Russia the word meant an obligation of the people to supply horses and vehicles for state use. When post offices on the mode of those in western Europe began to be established in Russia in the seventeenth century the employees thereof were called *jamstschiks*.

As in all other countries, the courier service in Russia was for centuries solely for the use of government. Postal communication with foreign countries was attempted by Ivan the Terrible (1547-1584). He sent two envoys, Schlitt and Saxon, to arrange direct service between Moscow and Augsburg, but the plan finally fell through. In 1665 the Czar Alexis Mikhaylovich again decreed that communication with

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other nations should be established. The only immediate result of this ukase was the opening of a messenger line between Moscow and Riga, which was long known in Russia as the German or Transmarine Post. Van Sveden, a Hollander, was director of this post.

Regular courier service within the empire, with posting stations and a schedule of departures, was not begun until 1672, when a royal ukase directed all provincial officials to send their letters and reports by the post.

Peter the Great (1682-1725) made the first real move towards furnishing mail facilities to the public. He caused public post offices, or *poste comptoirs*, as they were frequently called, to be erected alongside the *jam* offices. He imitated German methods of conveying mails and travelers. He introduced the post bugle, and fixed rigid time allowances for the movement of mail conveyances. But the service was so poorly patronized that the employees drew very low salaries. When the post office was established at St. Petersburg in 1717 Peter tried to comfort the director of it by conferring upon him the rank of ensign. But there was little nourishment in gold braid and salutes, and his salary was so small that he was granted the privilege of eking it out by keeping a restaurant. During the reign of the Empress Elizabeth, thirty years later, the salary of the office was raised. But the ignorance of the majority of the Russian people remained so abysmal that until comparatively recent times, their postal history was unimportant. Until near the end of the nineteenth century, only the few cities and larger towns were served by the government post, while private lines ministered more or less inefficiently to the rural districts.

Poland had a very early ambition to maintain communication with the capital of the church; and in 1458 a regular courier line was therefore established between Cracow and Rome, the route passing through Trentschin, Pressburg, Padua, Ferrara and Florence. In 1564, when this line had

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been in operation for more than a century, King Sigismund at his own expense installed communication with other Italian cities, notably Venice and Milan. The messenger for Venice left Cracow every Sunday, and was scheduled to make the trip in two weeks. So closely did the court come in touch with Italian ideas that in 1583 King Stefan Bathori granted to an Italian, Sebastian Montelupi, the exclusive right of carrying dispatches to foreign countries. This privilege descended to the grantee's heirs, and when in 1647 post offices and public mail service were set up in Poland the Montelupis continued as postmasters-general.

During the wars with Sweden and Russia in the reign of John Casimir (1648-1668) the postal system was badly deranged. The royal dispatches were carried by peasants and soldiers, while the people had almost no mail service at all until the war was over. When Charles Montelupi, postmaster-general, died in 1662, his widow took over the management of the posts and handled them well. War with Sweden in 1702 again practically wrecked the Polish mail service. King Augustus III (1733-1763) succeeded in restoring most of the lines, but soon after that Russia, Prussia and Austria began dividing Poland amongst them, and in the course of a few years Poland as an independent state was no more.

Sweden, like other countries, had royal couriers from very early days, but in a decree of the year 1556 the word "post" is used for the first time, so far as known, in speaking of the official messenger service, though there was still no regular schedule for it, a courier departing only when necessary. As early as 1577 the couriers were wearing badges to which were appended as many bell clappers as they were authorized to requisition horses when needed. In 1620 the first regular messenger service was started, operating between the court and the royal country residence.

When King Gustavus Adolphus took his army to Germany in 1630 to participate in the 'Thirty Years' War he founded

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a Swedish post office at Leipzig which maintained communication with the homeland, and also exchanged dispatches with Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna and other important cities. This office was not discontinued until 1650, two years after the treaty of peace had been signed.

Meanwhile, the first inland postal service which handled letters for the people had been organized through the efforts of the great chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna, in 1636. The letters were at first carried on foot. Respectable peasants were sworn in as postmasters, to keep relay stations along the roads, twelve to eighteen miles apart. Each postmaster must have two servants to carry the mails. These wore a large badge on the breast and carried a pike. One must always be ready at a station to continue on the route when another arrived. The minimum rate of their speed was specified, and any delay by a messenger was punished by an eight-day residence in jail on a diet of bread and water. The sentence might be extended to four weeks if it was shown that the delay was caused by gossiping on the road.

For the towns sworn postmasters were appointed, and it was an ironclad qualification that they must be able to read and write! Only noblemen's letters were delivered at their homes; all commoner folk must call at the post office. These peasant postmasters at first received no salary, but were only relieved from certain taxes and service liabilities. From 1683 on they received a small salary. In 1646 the foot messengers were replaced by mounted men, and in the eighteenth century mail coaches appeared on the better roads.

Finland, then a dependency of Sweden, received public mail service in 1638 through the efforts of Per Brahe, the governor. In the summer of that year a postal line was started by boat from Stockholm to Helsingfors, touching en route at the Aland Islands. Thence lines were established through southern Finland, at first by foot postmen, later by horse.

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Norway was connected with Denmark from the fourteenth century until taken over by Sweden in 1814, and her postal history during that time is largely that of the Danish kingdom. The public post service of Denmark was organized in 1653, and for thirty-two years was under the management of Paul Klingenberg as contractor. That gentleman found the business so profitable that he desired to extend his contract, and so put the king under obligation to him by loaning him money—forty thousand reichsthaler in all. Nevertheless the monarch was a bit obstinate when asked to renew the concession in 1685, and a compromise was finally effected, whereby Klingenberg turned the service over to Count Christian Gyldenlove on condition that Gyldenlove pay him immediately twelve thousand reichsthaler of the amount owed him by the king. This Count Gyldenlove was the king's illegitimate son, and, as he was only eleven years old, it cannot be imagined that he had a very clear understanding of the transaction, especially as he was abroad at the time, completing his education. Two months after the count became postmaster-general by purchase the king made his second natural son, Ulrich Gyldenlove, postmaster-general of Norway.

In May, 1701, Christian Gyldenlove, then aged twenty-seven, married Dorothea Krag. Fourteen months later he died, and his widow became postmaster-general of Denmark and the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein—the second instance within forty years of a woman's undertaking such a job, and that at a time when women in general were not looked upon as capable of handling business affairs. The Countess Gyldenlove delegated most of the work of her system to directors of her own appointment, but she chose them shrewdly and watched them, and under her régime the postal revenues were considerably increased. She was gifted, witty, energetic and kindly towards her subordinates; but, curiously enough, she managed her own personal affairs badly

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and left her estate in debt. She held the postal management until 1711, when the service was taken over by the state, and she was given as recompense an annual pension of forty thousand reichsthaler. Her descendants, however, were retained in the state service at the head of post-office affairs. Her grandson, Count Dannenskjold-Samsö, was killed in 1788 while director-general of the posts, and his great grandson retired as director-general of posts in 1873.

Mention of the child postmasters-general reminds us that such ideas were by no means confined to Denmark alone, but were found in several other countries in Europe. Some of the most amusing instances were in Holland. The mail service in general in the Low Countries has already been spoken of in the chapter on the Thurn and Taxis posts, but the youthful postmasters of the eighteenth century deserve special mention. To explain how this situation came about the Prussian ambassador, writing to his government, said:

The capacities of the person who is to manage the post-office do not enter into consideration. Sometimes the mayor keeps the postmastership for himself, sometimes he entrusts it to his son in the cradle, sometimes he gives it to his wife as a jointure or to his daughter as her marriage portion, and sometimes the postmastership is even entrusted to a relative or an intimate friend.

Not infrequently the position was let to a foreigner by the mayor by private contract; in which case the lessee usually agreed to pay a high life annuity to the mayor.

In the larger cities there would be four, five or more post offices, one handling the letters going to and from England, another France and Spain, another Germany, another the Netherlands, and so on. Among the postmasters holding these responsible positions in Amsterdam in 1748 were Willem Munter, two years old; Gerrit Munter, four years old; G. Corver Hooft, five years old; Jan Borell, seven years old.

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In The Hague, one Master Slingelandt, aged six, and Miss van Assendelft, aged fifteen, were prominent incumbents.

Fancy how puzzling those numerous post offices must have been to strangers in the city. Even old settlers needed considerable experience before they could know always where to post or claim a letter. Even post-office employees were frequently vague as to the location of foreign cities, the routes and the rates; and this was true not in Holland alone but almost everywhere. The amount of postage on a foreign letter was subject to the discretion of the postmaster or his chief clerk, and was fixed frequently by guess. You might find when you sent a letter from Ghent, let us say, to Königsberg, that the reply, coming back by the same route, would cost more (or perhaps less) than the letter sent. Complaints availed nothing, and it was the height of futility to complain of one post office to another in the same city. Though they were under the same government, as in Holland, for example, they were entirely independent of each other.

The first postal organization in Portugal took place in November, 1520, when King Manuel appointed Luiz Homem as the first *correiro-mor*, or postmaster-general. His appointment was confirmed by the succeeding king, Joao III, five years later; and thereafter, the position was hereditary in his family, even as certain other posts were to the Counts of Thurn and Taxis. The dispatches were carried partly on foot, partly by horse. No mail was handled for the public until well along in the seventeenth century, but passengers were "carried"—that is, horses were furnished them and they were theoretically escorted by the post; though in case of an attack by robbers, the passenger here as elsewhere usually had to defend himself as best he could.

The post was an absolute monopoly of the government. Postmen had certain immunities, being absolved from all state taxes and local impositions. They were not required to house soldiers, and their household effects could not be levied

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upon. When on journeys they could not be arrested for debt. All officials were compelled to provide them with food, horses, provender and guides, and make claim against the government, if necessary, for their pay. The government exercised such a paternalistic care over the post system, especially as to its function of conveying travelers, that by the late eighteenth century an amusing mass of regulations existed as to the procedure at the post inns, the tips to be given postilions and other functionaries, the fees for charcoal braziers supplied at inns for heating and cooking, the prices of meals on ordinary days and on fast days, and a thousand and one other things which the government thought it ought to control.

An important event of the early eighteenth century was the postal treaty signed by Portugal and England in 1705, which provided for a regular exchange of correspondence between the two countries. The mail packet boats engaged in this service left Falmouth and Lisbon regularly once a week. In 1800 letter boxes were installed and the first letter carriers began their rounds in Lisbon. In the late eighteenth century the government extended postal service to its province of Brazil—which will be noticed later.

Much has already been said about the early postal systems of Italy in the chapter on the Thurn and Taxis posts. Some Italian writers make the romantic claim that her postal service has descended to her, uninterrupted, from the Roman *Cursus publicus*—a romantic theory, but one very difficult to prove. A more probable legend has it that the first posts were in Piedmont in the Middle Ages. Some see in the *Corrieri di Venezia*, the dispatch system of the highly enlightened Venetian Republic in the fifteenth century, the actual beginning of the present Italian system. The earliest European postal guide known was published in Rome in 1563 by Giovanni dal Herba, master of the couriers of the

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republic of Genoa. There were at that time many post lines in Italy which carried letters and passengers.

The student of history will remember that for centuries before Victor Emmanuel I became King of United Italy, in 1861, the peninsula had been divided into numerous small states and provinces, which seemingly were in a constant state of turmoil and transition. They fought, made alliances, broke them, fought again and grouped themselves in new alliances. To-day one was in control of another, or two or three others, to-morrow its power was broken and itself passed under another's rule. Now and then France or Spain or Austria dipped into the stew, seized some territory and controlled it for its own profit until another war occurred. One's brain is dizzied as one essays the study of Italian history and tries to follow the ups and downs of Lombardy, Piedmont, Modena, Ferrara, Parma, Sardinia, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Kingdom of Naples, the Papal States, the Duchy of Milan, the republics of Venice, Florence and Genoa, the Two Sicilies, the Cisalpine, Ligurian and Tiberine republics of Napoleon's day, the Bishopric of Trent, the March of Ancona—why, if postage stamps had been in use only from 1700 on, the collector of to-day would require several additional albums for the Italian stamps alone; for every one of these states had its own postal system, which was changed and reorganized as the rulers changed or the country passed into a new incarnation. To recite the postal history of all of them would be too much—and it couldn't be done, anyhow.

A somewhat similar situation long existed in Switzerland. Prior to 1798 that country consisted of thirteen autonomous cantons. Each had its own post service and its own ideas as to rates. Naturally, there was much confusion and delay. Prefects and other officials stopped mails coming from other cantons whenever they chose, to look through the bags and see whether there were any letters for them, as well to

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speculate upon the contents of other correspondence. The Swiss, nevertheless, had a certain hard-headed common sense and efficiency, and in the eighteenth century they kept the mails moving in creditable style, considering the difficulties under which they labored—that is, the numerous frontiers and the most terrifically mountainous territory in Europe. A postal time-table issued at Zurich in 1732 is interesting as showing the regularity of movement at that time. The arrivals and departures for each day of the week are listed. Let us take as a sample the arrivals for

TUESDAY

At 4 o'clock in the afternoon arrives the post from Schaffhausen, with the letters from Stuttgart, **Ulm**, Nuremberg, Augsburg, Vienna; also, those from the whole empire, etc., Frankfort, Leipzig, Hamburg, Holland and England, etc. (In the margin was noted, These letters left Frankfort on Saturday evening at 8 o'clock.)

At 6 o'clock the letters from Lugano and Milan.

At 7 o'clock the goods from Schaffhausen.

A sample day of departures:

WEDNESDAY

In the forenoon, 7 o'clock, the parcel post leaves with goods for Aarau, Berne, etc., the canton of Vaud, Geneva, Lyons; this post also transports passengers.

At 9 o'clock the post for Aarau, with letters for Berne, Morges, Lausanne, etc., Geneva, Lyons, Paris and the whole of France; also the letters for Basel, Strasburg, Alsace, Lorraine, etc.

At 1 o'clock the letters for Schaffhausen, Stuttgart, **Ulm**, Nuremberg, Augsburg, Vienna, Leipzig, Hamburg, Frankfort, Holland and England, etc. (These letters arrive at Frankfort Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock.)

In the evening at 8 o'clock the post starts for Lugano and

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Milan. (These letters arrive at Milan very early on Sunday morning.)

These early Swiss postmen, especially those who traversed the grim Alpine passes leading to Italy, performed prodigies of unrecorded valor. One of the most famous post routes in history was that opened up early in the nineteenth century between Lindau, on the northern border of Switzerland, and Milan, passing up the headwaters of the Rhine via Coire, crossing the Splügen Pass and thence down by Lake Como. This post ran once a month and required twelve days for the trip. At first the caravan was composed of horses walking in single file, all attached to each other by leading straps, some carrying mail bags, some passengers. In winter, sleds were used save when the snow was too deep to admit of any travel at all. Through the Saint Gotthard, Saint Bernard and other awesome passes similar caravans toiled on their heroic round of duty.

The hodgepodge of kingdoms, duchies, principalities and free cities collectively known as Germany likewise presented a very pretty tangle, having at the beginning of the nineteenth century no less than thirty postal systems. This included that of Prince Thurn and Taxis, some of whose lines now and then crossed states which had postal organizations of their own. The complications, the bargaining, the struggles for advantage, the wrangles over postage and transfer from one system to another were endless. A sample of the ins and outs of post history there is seen in the case of Bavaria. At a solemn conclave between the Elector Charles Theodore and Prince von Taxis, early in 1783, it was agreed that Taxis should handle all the mail business of the country, but that none but Bavarians might be employed by him within the state boundaries. This arrangement lasted only a few months; then the government suddenly decided to take over the post service, removed the insignia of the Holy Roman



From Reichspostmuseum, Berlin

SLED USED ON THE POST ROUTE OVER THE SPLÜGEN PASS BETWEEN
SWITZERLAND AND ITALY IN 1822



Old print loaned by Danish Post Office Department

THE "BALL POST" WAGON USED BY DENMARK, EARLY NINETEENTH
CENTURY

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Empire, von Taxis's employer, from all coaches and post-houses and substituted the armorial bearings of the elector instead.

For more than twenty years von Taxis was "out," as far as Bavaria was concerned. Then in 1806 the Holy Roman Empire was formally dissolved and Bavaria, by the peace of Pressburg, became an autonomous kingdom. The irrepressible Prince Taxis now steps into office again and begins drawing a salary and perhaps other pickings as royal post-master of Bavaria!

Prussia, rapidly expanding its territory and its power and working its way towards the head of the Teutonic federation, had perhaps the best postal system among the German states. From the time when this facility was first extended to the public, it was a step in advance of the others, in that it carried not only letters but parcels, even heavy freight and passengers. King Frederick William I (1713-1740) said, "The posts in Prussia shall stop everywhere. I will have a country that is cultivated, and for that the post is necessary." A French cabinet minister traveling in Germany in the eighteenth century declared that "in Prussia the post is, next to the school, the most widely spread institution."

The Austrian State Post, which developed as a separate institution from the Imperial or Taxis system, carried, when it first became a public service, only letters, money and small parcels. In 1657 a printing firm at Prague obtained the right to send newspapers by post, which privilege was afterwards granted to other printers also. Thus the post and the newspaper became linked, and the *Wiener Diarium* began in 1703 to be published on the two days per week when the mails left Vienna. In Prague and other large towns the papers were published by postal officials.

The post in Austria was used by travelers as early as the middle of the seventeenth century, when the letters were being carried entirely on horseback. The traveler rode a horse,

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while his luggage and the parcel post followed in a heavy cart. It is noteworthy that at the very beginning of the eighteenth century, nearly a hundred and fifty years before Rowland Hill's reform in England, the Austrian postal service had anticipated him by charging a flat rate on letters without regard to distance. The fee per letter was six kreutzer, one-half prepaid and one-half on delivery. In 1722 the rate was increased to eight kreutzer. This was so high that it encouraged "bootlegging" and many livery-stable keepers, carriers, peddlers and others carried letters secretly.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, traveling in 1716 from Vienna to Dresden, was a severe critic of Austrian and other German posts in general.

I received your ladyship's letter but the day before I left Vienna [she wrote a friend], though, by the date, I ought to have had it much sooner, but nothing was ever worse regulated than the post in most parts of Germany. I can assure you the packet at Prague was behind my chaise, and in that manner conveyed to Dresden, so that the secrets of one-half the country were at my mercy, if I had any curiosity for them.

Her remark might be taken to indicate that the "packet," as she calls it, was not even sealed nor locked, which one is inclined to doubt, as such precautions were being generally observed in Europe then. The mail carrier at that time is frequently spoken of as a "portmanteau," and in truth it was more like a traveler's valise in shape than like the modern mail bag. As the years passed, it gradually became more and more of a flexible bag. Prints of about 1800 show the English carrier of that day to have been a rectangular, somewhat flattened bag, opening valiselike at the top, and with a long strap handle to facilitate its being caught by the coach guard on the fly. The Dutch may have been the first to use bags all of canvas. Before 1750 each office in Holland had a supply of such bags, with the name of the office printed

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on the inside. When sent out their destination was written on a tag and they were sealed with wax. The receiving office turned the bags inside out and returned them full, the name printed on the lining now serving as an address.

Meanwhile, Lady Mary is continuing her criticisms of the post systems in the German states by attacking the post-houses, especially those in Bohemia.

The villages are so poor and the post houses so miserable [she went on] that clean straw and fair water are blessings not always to be met with, and better accommodations not to be hoped for. Though I carried my own bed with me, I would not sometimes find a place to set it up in; and I rather prefer to travel all night, cold as it is, than to go into the common stoves, which are filled with a mixture of all sorts of ill scents.

Under the reign of Maria Theresa, beginning in 1740, the extension of the nation's trade and various reforms which her government carried out, caused a rapid growth of the postal business. The postage on letters was now reduced and the service in general so much improved that travelers in Austria in the latter part of the eighteenth century spoke of it very highly. And this in spite of two destructive wars which together occupied the space of fifteen years. The greater part of the action took place on soil other than Austria's, and as has already been noted the queen and Louis XV both gave strict orders that the posts were not to be molested.

M. de Chamousset of Paris failed to carry out his grand scheme of putting the Petite Post into every capital of Europe; and in 1772 another Frenchman named Hardy installed a city post system in Vienna. Oddly enough it was managed by a Hollander named Schooten. Prepayment was exacted, as in Paris and London, and this post seems also to have delivered small parcels. The privilege was withdrawn in 1785 and the system merged with the state posts.

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Even in the eighteenth century some of the messenger lines of the German universities were still functioning. And not alone the old ones; in 1735, shortly after the founding of the University of Göttingen, the postal director of Hanover authorized the founding of the University Post line between Göttingen and Langensalza.

The first extensive compiler of travelers' guides lived in Germany in the seventeenth century. This was Martin Zeiller, a notary public of Ulm. His first book, which described the posting service in the German states, was printed in Strasbourg in 1632. He later issued similar guides for France, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal and Italy. The fashion rather favored large books in his day, and Zeiller's guides were printed in large type in big folio volumes. But after a time it occurred to the author, or perhaps some one pointed it out to him, that such books would be more than a trifle awkward to carry with one in coaches or on horseback, and so in 1651 he issued smaller sizes for use on the road, calling these *Fidus Achates*, or the *Faithful Traveling Companion*.

Numerous pictures of the turbulence with which society was so frequently plagued in the early centuries of modern history are found in the reports of the postal service, pictures which, curiously enough, never seem to get into the general histories. The fear of the night which was not entirely unjustifiable in those stormy days, led cities and towns to close their gates at dusk, and thereafter admit no one unless he could prove that he was on state service of the highest importance. Even the posts were shut out of many towns as late as the seventeenth century if they arrived after the gates were closed. In such cases the postboy blew his horn and sometimes—not always—the gatekeeper grumblingly accepted the bag and sent it to the post office; while the rider made himself as comfortable as he could at the inn which usually stood outside the gates for the accommodation of just such

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belated ones as he. When French postal contractors about 1670 asked leave to establish a post office in Geneva, the town council, after much hesitation, agreed to permit it, but only on several conditions, one of which was that "when the city gates have been closed, they shall not be opened for the posts."

In the chapter on France we have noticed the complaints of laxness and even of thievery on the part of the postmasters. There were other charges against them, too. It was said that some of them hid their best horses from the postboys so that they might let them to travelers at high rates; that they often feigned not to hear the post-horn signal, or declared that they had no horses in the stable, this in order to force travelers to spend the night at their houses; that they not infrequently held back important mails, destroying the waybills, so that the points where the irregularities occurred could not be traced.

There is no doubt that the majority of postmasters and riders, even in the seventeenth century, were ignorant of any geography outside of their own immediate neighborhood. If you were in Rome and wanted to write to Lucerne, you wrote "Via Milan to Lucerne" on your envelope, because no postal official in or near Rome could be expected to know where Lucerne was; but Milan was known in Rome, and Lucerne was known in Milan. You either paid the postage to Milan only and let the addressee pay the balance, or you sent the letter under cover to an acquaintance in Milan, who paid the postage thence to Lucerne, or you let the man in Milan pay for the first stage and the man in Lucerne for the second, or in short, if you were a sensible man, you did anything but offer to pay the postage all the way through, for the clerk in Rome could only guess at it, and he was sure to guess more than high enough to be on the safe side.

But other affiants come and present testimony to show that the postmasters were not the only ones to be criticized; in

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fact, some will have it that they were more sinned against than sinning. There is no doubt that it was often difficult to carry on the service, especially if it was in the hands of contractors rather than directly under government. M. Laeper, a recent German writer,* says that many local authorities ignored the rules, treated the postmasters as their subordinates, even took horses from the post stables for use on the farms when they were sorely needed to carry travelers and mail.

The postmasters were in no way protected from the most outrageous behavior on the part of travellers, and were unable to prevent them from overloading the horses and vehicles with unreasonably heavy things, chests, boxes and similar articles, by which the conveyance was delayed. They could not hinder many travelers from riding heavily-laden horses at full speed over hill and dale without drawing rein, so that the animals were crippled or even ridden to death, and in consequence the postmasters were frequently unable to carry out the service for want of horses. The worst treatment, however, which the postmasters experienced was at the hands of cavaliers and couriers, who often demanded more horses than they needed, took them by force, overloaded the coaches with two or three servants and an immoderate quantity of baggage and paid an arbitrary sum, just whatever they pleased, often not half what was due.

If the postmasters refused to supply such men with means of conveyance, or were unable to do so for lack of horses, "it generally happens," said a report of 1686, "that the cavaliers and couriers violently assail the postmasters with the most disgraceful abuse and threats, nay, even assault them with cudgels, swords and other weapons, not without evident danger to their lives and scandalous insult to the postal service, so that they are obliged to hide themselves or to run away, and are frequently unable to get servants, owing to such bad treatment."

* Director of Posts at Markirch, Alsace, in *L'Union Postale*, October 1, 1885.

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Complaints of this kind occurred even into the eighteenth century. Under an Austrian postal order of 1748, the postmasters were specifically authorized to act in self-defense, and local authorities were bound to assist them. After all, it would be pretty difficult for us, at two or three centuries' distance, to determine the degree of blame for any disorder of those blustery years.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE BRITISH POSTS

The Post Office is the brain of the whole world.

Pictures of London, 1808.

TO Americans the English postal system is of peculiar interest, because it is the mother of their own. No mail service of the world can boast of more romance, more adventure, more quaint and amusing episodes than are found in the story of the English posts.

Until the time of Henry VIII or thereabouts there was no regular posting system in England for government use. Couriers were sent when and as occasion required, and might call upon any one along their route for such horses and other assistance as they needed. The excellent courier system founded in France by Louis XI and being imitated by other countries spurred England to action. Sir Brian Tuke was made Master of the Posts by Henry VIII and given authority to organize a better system; that is, to set up post relay stations "in all places most expedient," and to provide for a regular supply of horses.

Sir, it may like you to understonde [wrote Sir Brian to Thomas Cromwell in 1533, in explaining the existing deficiencies] the Kinges Grace hathe no moo ordinary postes, ne of many days hathe had, but bitwene London and Calais . . . and sens October last, the postes northewarde. . . . For, Sir, ye knowe well that, except the hakney horses bitwene Gravesende and Dovour, there is no suche usual conveyance in post for men in this realme as is in the accustomed places of France and other parties; ne men cen keepe horses in redynes withoute som way

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to bere the charges; but when placardes be sent for suche cause [*i.e.*, to order the immediate forwarding of some state dispatch] the constables many tymes be fayne to take horses out of plowes and cartes, wherein can be no extreme diligence.

Sir Brian goes on to relate how the messengers have been “evil intreated many times by the herbigeours” when they asked for “horse rome or horsemete, without which diligence cannot be.” Post horses were provided by the township; the Corporation of Leicester, for example, bound itself to keep four in constant readiness for the sovereign’s use—and it was now Sir Brian’s job to keep the townships up to their duty.

There were a considerable number of foreigners—“strangers” was the common name for them—engaged in importing, exporting and other businesses in London, and from the fifteenth century on they were permitted to maintain what was called the Strangers’ Post in London for the sending of their letters and packets abroad. They chose the postmaster and shared the expense among themselves. But in 1538 the inevitable happened: a dispute arose between two factions, the Italian and the Flemish merchants, over the postmastership, and the result was that the crown forbade their having a post office any longer. Shortly afterwards Thomas Randolph was chosen as the first “Chief Postmaster” of all England. This was in Elizabeth’s time.

The first regulations on record for the conduct of the post were issued by Elizabeth. Every postman was to keep constantly ready at least two horses with suitable “furniture.” He was to have two bags of leather, well lined with baize or cotton, and a horn to blow, “as oft as he meets company,” or four times in every mile. After receiving a packet he must start with it within fifteen minutes and ride in summer at the rate of seven miles an hour, in winter at five. The address of the packet and the day and hour of his receiving it were to be carefully recorded. But the letters thus received

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were only those which had to do with the queen's affairs or affairs of state. All others, was the rule, "are to passe as by-letters."

This casual sentence shows that even in Elizabeth's time a few letters other than those of government had begun to be carried by the posts. They were given scant consideration as compared with state missives, but at least it had begun to be recognized that the posts might serve the people a bit when such service did not inconvenience the government. But, on the other hand, there were not many private persons in Elizabeth's time who wrote letters, for not many knew how to write. The common people were generally illiterate, especially the church adherents; the better educated were generally found among the dissenters. The Reformation gave a great impetus to education. Every pious person longed first of all to read the Bible for himself, and a taste of reading brought a craving for other books.

One of the earliest letters still in existence carried by the post in England is one sent by Archbishop Matthew Parker of Canterbury to Sir William Cecil in 1566:

SIR—According to the Queen's Majy's pleasure and your advertisement, you shall receive a form of prayer, which, after you have perused and judged of it, shall be put in print and published immediately.

From my house at Croydon, this 22d July, 1566, at 4 of the clock afternoon. Your honour's alway,

MATTH. CANTUAR.

This letter bears the following indorsements:

Received at Waltham Cross the 23d of July, about 9 at night.

Received at Croxton, the 24th of July, between 7 and 8 of the clock in the morning.

The distance from Croydon to Waltham Cross was twenty-six miles, from Waltham Cross to Ware eight miles, and

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from Ware to Croxton twenty-nine miles. The letter therefore required nearly forty hours to travel sixty-three miles.

The secondary and scarcely less important function of the state post service of England, as elsewhere, in the sixteenth century was that of affording conveyance to persons employed on high government missions. As might have been expected, it came to be a not uncommon practice for others who wished to jaunt somewhere on their own private interest or pleasure to pretend that they were on crown business, and thereby get the best transportation service the country afforded. James I (1603-1625), with true Scotch thrift, issued a proclamation as soon as he mounted the throne to check such practices. One must now show a state commission before one might use the post, and there were rules as to the speed at which horses might be ridden and the loads to be carried. On roads where the crown posts operated no one save government postmasters might let horses to travelers; and on those roads all persons not duly licensed by the Master of the Posts were prohibited from carrying letters. This meant that on the main roads of the kingdom no traveler could pass and (save by private hand) no letter could be delivered without coming under the knowledge of the government. The real object of these regulations was of course that of spying upon the public and preventing conspiracy. The post became a sort of detective agency. Cromwell, that great democrat and lover of the people, was quite frank, a few years later, in avowing this as one of the prime functions of the mail service. By his time the stealthy opening of private letters had come to be common practice.

An English postal employee of great moment to America was one William Brewster, who was master of the post-house at Scrooby in Nottinghamshire from 1594 to 1607, under Elizabeth and James I. He was not a postmaster in the sense of the word to-day, but merely kept the inn and

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stable of relay horses at his village, which was one of the twenty-six stations on the Great North Road, that is, the road to Scotland. The expense account of Sir Timothy Hutton on a journey in 1605 gives a sample of the functions performed by the post for travelers in Brewster's day. Hutton paid the post at Scrooby, "for post-chaise and guide to Tuxford 10s, and for candle, supper and breakfast 7s 10d." On his return journey he paid eight shillings at Scrooby for conveyance to Doncaster, then reckoned seven miles, and two shillings "for burnt sack, bread, beer and sugar to wine, and 3d to the ostler."

William Brewster, a man of substance and character, made his home in the fine old Scrooby Manor House, which had entertained not only nobles and archbishops but even a king in its day. Some have said that in this house was born the American Republic, for here the "Brownist" Puritan church of Scrooby first began to meet. Brewster was ruling elder of the congregation after it had removed to Leyden in 1609; he was one of the most influential of those who crossed the sea in the *Mayflower*, and again he was ruling elder in the congregation at Plymouth.

Even had the laws been less rigorous, there could not have been any great service given the public by the post in King James's time, for there were only four lines in operation at best, and sometimes only three. The four that were functioning in 1621 were: "The Court to Barwicke" (the post to Scotland); "The Court to Beaumoris" (the post to Ireland); "The Court to Dover" (the post to the Continent); and "The Court to Plymouth" (the line to the Royal Dockyard). Of these, the post to Plymouth was abandoned in times of peace for years at a stretch on the ground that it was not needed.

How little these few lines did for the spread of intelligence becomes evident when one learns that the news of the death of Queen Elizabeth was borne to King James in Scotland in



From Reichspostmuseum, Berlin

POSTMEN IN THE SPREEWALD, THE NETWORK OF LAKES AND BAYOUS
NEAR BERLIN, IN SUMMER



From Reichspostmuseum, Berlin

IN WINTER THE MAIL IS DELIVERED IN THE SPREEWALD ON SKATES

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three days, but that parts of Devonshire and Cornwall did not hear of it until the court had ceased to wear mourning for her. The good condition of the Great North Road had much to do with the speed of intelligence to Edinburgh. In 1642 a courier rode from London to York and back, about four hundred miles, in thirty-four hours; but some parts of Wales did not hear of the death of Charles I until more than two months after it had occurred. Of course it was considered essential to convey the news of the queen's death to James of Scotland as rapidly as possible, he having been named as her successor, and the courier killed horses in his record-breaking ride. Messengers even on important business usually took twice as long for the trip. The ordinary rate of speed for travelers by post is seen in a journey made by Queen Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, from London to Dover, which occupied four days, or at the rate of about eighteen miles per day.

In James's reign the trouble with the foreign merchants arose once more to plague the youthful post service, which was still in the amateur stage and did not yet know what to do with itself. The king had finally gone to the length of decreeing that no letters were to be sent save through the posts; which, considering the kind of service offered by that organization, was a bit discouraging to correspondence, to say the least. This regulation was aimed particularly at the "strangers," of whom the thick-witted king and his counselors were highly suspicious. The government asserted that one of its greatest cares had been "to meete with the dangerous and secret intelligences of ill-affected persons, both at home and abroad, by the overgreat liberty taken both in writing and riding in poste, specially in and through our countie of Kent."

Lord Stanhope of Harrington was Master of the Posts at the time, and his superintendent of the foreign post line to Dover was an alien named De Quester. This man was so

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prompt and efficient that in 1619 the king made the foreign post a separate department, independent of Stanhope, and put De Quester at the head of it. This brought on bitter opposition from Stanhope, whose perquisite was a percentage of the postal fees, and who pointed to the fact that his letters patent placed not only the internal posts but "those beyond the seas within the king's dominions" under his charge. He and his son skirmished with De Quester for years, warned all and sundry against patronizing De Quester's post, sued him in the Court of King's Bench, and stirred up some disgruntled foreign merchants to fight against him. The Privy Council were so muddled over the question that they changed ground every few days; first granting the "Merchant Adventurers" "a post of their own choice" to Hamburg and Delft; then summoning them to show cause why they should not send their packets by De Quester; then granting their concession again, withdrawing it and finally granting it once more and with only a few restrictions.

De Quester fought through the courts and by wire pulling, and gained advantages from time to time; but in 1632, being old and infirm, then turned his patent over to two other men, Frizell and Witherings; the last-named destined to be one of the outstanding figures in England's postal history. He showed such great ability from the very start that he was presently asked to propose plans for the improvement of the domestic posts. He did so, and his ideas were so good that in 1637 he was put in charge of the entire system.

The post lines were in sad condition when Witherings first surveyed them. Roads were bad, the posting service was poor, and few people traveled. With no travelers to entertain, the keepers of the posthouses had nothing but their wages to live on, and the public treasury was so low that these had long remained unpaid. As far back as 1628 the "99 poore men," as the postmasters called themselves, had petitioned the Council, stating that they had received no

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wages for seven years, and that the arrears due them then amounted to more than twenty-two thousand pounds. Some of them were in prison for debt and many more were threatened with arrest. By 1635 most of them had become too poor to keep horses, and letters were being carried on foot. As a result, said Witherings in his report, "if anie of Ma^{ts} subjects shall write to Madrill in Spain, hee shall receive anwer sooner and surer than hee shall out of Scotland or Ireland. The letters being now carried by carriers or foot-posts 16 or 18 miles a day; it is full two months before any answer can be received from Scotland or Ireland to London."

Witherings drew up a new scheme for the service, laying out trunk lines to the principal cities of the kingdom, with branch posts—foot or horse, according to distance—to the smaller towns. His plan was that the branch postmen should make close connection with the main line carriers, who should start and arrive at stated times and travel both by night and day, so as to cover one hundred and twenty miles in twenty-four hours.

The financial part of his plan was equally important. The posts so far had been a heavy expense to the crown. Witherings believed that he could make them pay their own way, though he had no conception of the highly profitable state to which the British Post Office was to come in later centuries. The chief feature of his plan for putting the ailing system on its feet was that of throwing it open to the public everywhere for the carriage of letters.

His belief in the soundness of this idea had been brought about by his observation of the numerous private carrier lines which were in operation throughout the kingdom, and which transported freight, passengers, letters, anything they could get. In 1633 the mayor and aldermen of Barnstaple had even set up a municipal carrier line between their town and Exeter, where it connected with the crown post running

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between London and Plymouth. The king paid the expense of the latter service, but for the carriage to Exeter the Barnstaple post, to help pay expenses, charged sixpence on a single and eightpence on a double letter. Other Devonshire towns began to take up the idea, and Witherings saw in it the germ of his own system. He therefore worked out the following scale of rates:

	Single Letter	Double Letter	"If bigger"
Under 80 miles.....	2d	4d	6d an oz.
80 miles and not exceeding 140.	4d	8d	9d "
Above 140 miles.....	6d	12d	12d "
To or from Scotland.....	8d	?	?
To or from Ireland.....	9d		After two ounces, 6d the ounce.

Thus did the first system of postage in England come into existence. The rules for the accommodation of travelers were but little changed. Finally, with certain specified exceptions, no one might handle letters where the post operated unless appointed by the Master of Posts. The letters excepted were those sent by the hand of a friend, those by a particular messenger employed for the particular occasion, or those sent by "a common, known carrier." The carrier, however, was not to handle any letters outside of his regular route.

Witherings excepted the carriers because he did not wish to antagonize them. He overcame their competition in another way—by giving superior service. Whereas the carriers traveled in clumsy wagons or other nondescript vehicles and spent eight or nine days in going one hundred and twenty miles, the new post covered that distance in twenty-four hours, and, furthermore, carried a letter at a slightly cheaper rate.

THE
Carriers' Cosmography:

or

A Brief Relation

of

The Inns, Ordinaries, Hostelries,
and other lodgings in and near London; where the
Carriers, Waggon, Foot-posts and Higgles
do usually come from any parts, towns,
shires and countries of the Kingdoms of Eng-
land, Principality of Wales; as also from the
Kingdoms of Scotland and Ireland.

With nomination of what days of
the week they do come to London, and on
what days they return: whereby all sorts of
people may find direction how to receive or send
goods or letters unto such places as their
occasions may require.

As also,

Where the Ships, Hoys, Barks,
Tiltboats, Barges and Wherries, do usually attend
to carry Passengers and Goods to the coast towns
of England, Scotland, Ireland, or the Netherlands;
and where the Barges and Boats are ordinarily
to be had, that go up the River of Thames
westward from London.

By *Iohn Taylor*.

London Printed by *A. G.* 1637.

TITLE-PAGE OF "THE CARRIERS' COSMOGRAPHY"

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When the Witherings plan went into operation in 1637, there were myriads of carrier lines running out of London. A quaint pamphlet of that year, *The Carriers' Cosmography*, compiled "By John Taylor," gives an almost complete directory of them.

Carriers operating from London to nearly two hundred towns are listed in the pamphlet. Some towns had several competing carriers, who came to the city on different days of the week, and stopped at various inns. The listing is crudely alphabetical, according to the names of the towns. A few paragraphs from the beginning will show its drift:

The Carriers of St. Albans do come every Friday to the sign of the *Peacock* in Aldersgate street: on which days also cometh a coach from St. Albans, to the *Bell* in the same street. The like Coach is also there for the carriage of passengers every Tuesday.

The Carriers of Abingdon do lodge at the *George* in Bread street. They do come on Wednesdays, and go away on Thursdays.

The Carriers of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire do lodge at the *George* near Holborn Bridge, at the *Swan* in the Strand, at the *Angel* behind St. Clement's Church, and at the *Bell* in Holborn. They are at one of these places every other day.

The Carriers of Ashbury do lodge at the *Castle* in Great Wood Street. They are to be found there on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Some carriers had no single town as their terminus, but served a considerable rural district, as:

There be Carriers that do pass to and through sundry parts of Leicestershire; which do lodge at the *Ram* in Smithfield.

In a few instances the word carriers is not used; why, it is difficult to say:

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The Waggon from Chelmsford in Essex come on Wednesdays to the sign of the *Blue Boar* without Aldgate.

The Waggon or Coach from Hertford town doth come every Friday to the *Four Swans* without Bishopsgate street.

The Wains of Ingarstone in Essex do come every Wednesday to the *King's Arms* in Leadenhall Street.

And there are three or four delightful variations :

There doth come from Great Marlow in Buckinghamshire some higglers or demi-carriers. They do lodge at the *Swan* in the Strand, and they come every Tuesday.

Clothiers do come every week out of divers parts of Gloucestershire to the *Saracen's Head* in Friday street.

Probably these fellows combined carrying and peddling. There were a few men exclusivley letter carriers, too, as to wit :

There doth come from Saffron Market in Norfolk a Foot Post who lodgeth at the *Chequer* in Holborn.

There is a Foot Post that doth come every second Thursday from Nottingham. He lodgeth at the *Swan* in St. John's street.

There is a Foot Post from Walsingham that doth come to the *Cross-keys* in Holborn every second Thursday.

Under the heading, FOR SCOTLAND, we read :

Those that will send any letter to Edinburgh, that so they may be conveyed to and fro to any parts of the kingdom of Scotland, the Post doth lodge at the sign of the *King's Arms* (or the *Cradle*) at the upper end of Cheapside: from whence, every Monday, any that have occasion may send.

The final paragraph generously acknowledges the existence of the carriers' competitor, the king's post system :

All those that will send letters to the most parts of the habitable world, or to any parts of our King of Great Britain's Do-

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minions; let them repair to the General Post Master THOMAS WITHERINGS at his house in Sherburne lane, near Abchurch.

The most famous carrier of that age, the one who gave the English language one of the commonest of its bywords, was Tobias Hobson of Cambridge. For sixty years he drove to and fro between Cambridge and London; and some verses written by Milton upon his death reveal that he was known as the university carrier, for both Cambridge and Oxford still had their messengers through most of the seventeenth century, just as did the universities of the Continent. In addition to being a carrier, Hobson ran what we Americans call a livery stable. Addison says that he was "the first man in England to let out hackney horses"; and the story is that though a prospective customer might be shown his whole stable full of horses, the customer always had to take the animal which stood nearest the door; whence the expression, "Hobson's choice."

Hobson grew to be one of the wealthiest citizens of Cambridge, but still drove his covered wagon regularly to London until the plague broke out there in 1630 and stopped all traffic. A few months later, at the age of eighty-six, he died, as a result, many believed, of his enforced idleness. John Milton, then an undergraduate at Christ's College, wrote the only humorous poems of his life—two of them—on Hobson. One began thus:

Here lies old Hobson. Death hath broke his girt,
And here, alas, hath laid him in the dirt.

The other dwelt on the cause of his death:

Here lieth one who did most truly prove
That he would never die while he could move.

.

But had his doings lasted as they were,
He had been an immortal carrier.

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Obedient to the moon, he spent his date
In course reciprocal, and had his fate
Linked to the mutual flowing of the seas.
Yet (strange to think) his wain was his increase.
His letters are delivered all and gone,
Only remains this superscription.

One is reminded of another of our favorite phrases when one reads that after Witherings had organized the new postal system, the custom of writing "Haste, Post, haste!" on letters fell into decline. It appears on dispatches sent as far back as the early fourteenth century, when it was considered a necessary admonition to the courier to keep him up to his work; and it was almost invariably coupled with some ominous exhortation such as "Ride, villain, ride—for thy life, for thy life, for thy life!" which was no mere vain threat. According to Sir Brian Tuke, the obligation to furnish post horses was "on payn of lyfe." In Italy one finds dispatches endorsed, "Haste, haste, haste, flying night and day, on pain of the gallows!" Occasionally a rude skull and crossbones was drawn alongside the address, or a picture of a man hanging on a gallows, possibly as a gentle reminder in case the courier could not read. In the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) the Lord Protector, Somerset, endorses his letter to Lord Dacre, "To our very good Lord, the Lord Dacre, Warden of the West Marches, in haste; haste, post, haste, for thy life, for thy life, for thy life." An endorsement on a letter by the good-natured George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham in 1627, omits the threat (which may be a sign of progress in humanity) but is very insistent upon speed; "For His Majesty's special affairs; hast, hast, hast, post, hast, hast, hast, hast, with all possible speede."

The custom of adding "these" to the direction of a letter arose from the original practice of writing "Hasten these," which again originally meant "These presents." Some old letters bear the direction, "To ——— Give these with

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speed." A typical address of a private individual's letter in the early seventeenth century is worth reproducing. The missive is from Charles Gaudy, one of a fine old family of Norfolk, to his older brother, Framlingham Gaudy, then sojourning in London, and he ingenuously announces the relationship to all the world—as did many others of his day—on his cover:

To his most noble brother, Mr. Framlingham Gaudy at London in Fleetstreete, at y^e barbers shopp right agaynst y^e kinges head taverne hard by Saynt Dunstenes Church, theese.

And by the way, this particular letter is so amusing that it is worth copying. Charles had borrowed Brother Fram's fine hat, and was desirous of extending the loan:

SIR—If I had sent you your hatte by Mr. Bell it had been spoiled with raine; it hath not beene worne since nor shall not bee while I heare from you. Sr, I have sent this messenger a purpose to desire you to give me leave to weare it but one day, whiche is apou Thursday next. It is my sister Stannupe's crisin day, and there will bee a great dill of Company. My sister hath a girle, and Sr Thomis Jermin and my sister Feltonne and Lady Drury answeare for it. Sr, I do much desire to hear of my Sister's and yours good amendment. I rest Ever to be commanded by you both; CHA: GAUDY.

I pray forgett not my love to Doll.

*To his noble frind
and Brother Mr.
Framlingham Gaudy
at Harlinge.*

A letter from Framlingham Gaudy to his wife is likewise too pleasantly flavorful of the times to be omitted here. It will be seen that—as always happened when a man made one of those rare visits to the great city—a neighbor had asked him to do an errand for her; in this case, it seems, to match

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some dry goods and probably send the parcel out by the carrier. Perhaps some one else had requested him to buy a pound of that imported novelty, tea; another had given him money to pay off a note which was held by a city financier, and so on. The Sir Giles Mompesson whom he mentions was a crooked promoter who fled to the Continent to escape prosecution:

DEARE WYFYE,—I am sorry I cannot dyspatche my busynes to come ynto the country where I longe to be w^{ch} I hope will nott now be longe. Tell my ladye Bell I can fynde no such stuff as she would haue, and therefore haue sent her money agayne. I pray remember me to them both, and tell them I would fayne see them before they go out of the cuntrye. News here ys none, but that syr Jyles Munpesson ys run away. Commend me to my cosin Doll and tell her she ys happye she mist her lover, who ys the deboysteste * young man yn the towne, and shalbe disinherytred. Commend me to my cosin Cresner and his wyfe and to all my children and I will rest

Your loving husbande till deathe

FRAMLINGHAM GAUDY.

Gaudy's wife in writing to him, addresses the letter to "My most Worthy and best beloved husban, Mr. Gaudy." Her letter is folded into cocked hat shape, bound with silk and sealed with two seals. The usual method of making up a letter for the post in those days was to fold it from the four sides into a rectangular shape, then double it over, pierce both folds with a knife and pass through the holes thus made a strand of silk, which was then wound around the letter this way and that and secured with a wax seal on the other side from the address.

To return to official matters, Witherings had been in office scarcely three years when he met the fate of many a worthy reformer and innovator. He was charged with "divers

* Debauchedest.

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abuses and misdemeanors" in office and was discharged from his position. Whether he was guilty in any degree it is difficult to say; but it seems more probable that jealousies and plotting of men who had been hurt by the changes in the post or who hankered for a chance at the profits from it were responsible for his overthrow. In any case, the postal system of England owes much honor to his memory.

As might have been expected, mismanagement and turmoil followed hard upon his retirement. There were two claimants for his job, the Commons supporting one of them and the Lords the other; and their rivalry reached the point where armed bodies of their hired men waylaid the mail, captured it, and sometimes in turn were themselves beaten or captured by opposing forces after sanguinary battles. The two Houses of Parliament held a conference in 1644 and patched up the quarrel, confirming Edmund Prideaux, one of the claimants, as Master of the Posts.

Prideaux extended the service, but the Common Council of London were not satisfied with his weekly mail to Scotland, and established a line of their own in 1649, appointing postmasters all along the way. They were about to do the same for other parts of the country when Parliament suppressed their Scottish enterprise and forbade the others. But the Commons likewise declared that the crown posts had become so profitable that the state ought to receive some benefit from them. Heretofore, in consideration of his defraying the costs of the service, the Master of the Posts had been permitted to absorb all the postage fees. Now Parliament decided that in addition to paying the expenses, he must also pay to the state a fixed rent of five thousand pounds. Thus began the farming of the posts, a method which continued for the general postal service until near the end of the seventeenth century, and for the byposts until past the middle of the eighteenth. As indicating the rapid growth of the business, it may be mentioned that four years

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later, in 1653, the rental was raised to ten thousand pounds; and when the office was let in 1667, only fourteen years after that, the figure was forty-three thousand pounds a year!

History in general has not noticed this amazing and significant growth of the mail service. The very fact itself that the mails had been thrown open to the public in England, as they were in several countries on the Continent at almost the same time, was full of meaning. It signified that Knowledge and Freedom were beginning to show their faces through the medieval murk which had hitherto enveloped society. In truth, a sort of golden age had now come upon Britain. In those middle years of the century, when the mail service was doubling and trebling almost overnight, great things were being done for learning and literature. Libraries were being founded and investigative societies organized. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Dekker, Chapman, Marston, Middleton, Webster, Massinger, Ford, Rowley, Drayton, a galaxy of dramatists such as the world has not seen elsewhere, were just passing off the stage (though leaving their works very much alive), while Dryden, Davenant, Wycherly, Congreve and Vanbrugh were following close after them. English adventurers were sailing to the seven seas, and fascinating books of travel by Coryat, Purchas, Hakluyt and Sandys were widely read. Some of our language's great masterpieces were being produced: Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Butler's *Hudibras*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Walton's *Compleat Angler*, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Clarendon and Bishop Burnet were writing their remarkable histories. Cowley, Waller, Suckling, Lovelace, Herrick, Rochester and a dozen more were scribbling melodious verse. Thomas Fuller, Richard Baxter, Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, Phineas Fletcher, these are only a few of the names that rise to one's memory among those who were sending forth material which book lovers still

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read with delight. Bacon, Newton, Locke and others made the century memorable with their inquiries into science and philosophy; while Pepys and Evelyn typified the eager laymen of the day, amateurs in all the arts and sciences, zealously striving to know more about them all and keenly interested in a discussion of any of them.

Encouraged by mail facilities, people now wrote letters who had never written them before. Among those whose pens were the more facile, the letter was developed until it became a form of literature. John Locke, in the latter years of the century, said, "The writing of letters enters so much into all the occasions of life that no gentleman can avoid shewing himself in composition of this kind. Occurrences will daily force him to make use of his pen, which lays open his breeding, his sense and his ability to a severer examination than any oral discourse." Less than a century before, Locke would probably not have been moved to say that, because the writing of letters had not yet been encouraged to enter so fully "into all the occasions of life."

It was in 1657, under Cromwell, that the Post-Office Act was passed, which laid the foundation of the present system. It was in this act that the possibility of espionage upon private communication was declared to be one of the great benefits of the post to the state. The rate on a single letter, that is, one containing a single sheet of paper, to Ireland was by this law fixed at sixpence; to Scotland fourpence; beyond a radius of eighty miles from London threepence, and within that radius twopence. When the monarchy was restored in 1660, a new act was passed, which, with some slight changes in the postage rates, practically duplicated this one.

Now and then a private attempt was made to get a share of the profits which the post office was believed to be yielding to the contractors. In 1658 one John Hill conceived the idea of a line between London and York which should

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carry letters for a penny. He was squelched by the Commonwealth, and wrote some indignant pamphlets in vindication of his rights. It was an age, by the way, when pamphlets flew about like snowflakes on a winter day.

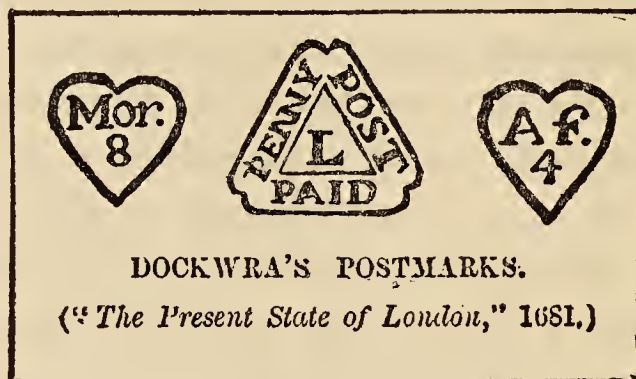
The next essay at a private post had for its motive the idea of public service rather than gain. In no country did the government at first comprehend the need of the large cities for better communication within their own boundaries. In England, for example, there was a mail which went through Kent and to the Downs every day; to some other parts of England, Scotland posts started every other day; Wales and Ireland had a mail from the capital twice a week; but from one part of the world's metropolis to another there was no public medium whatsoever for sending a letter. One must send by one's own servant, or if there were no servant, by a hired messenger; and whomsoever it was that carried it, he would be at a disadvantage, in that there was no numbering of houses, and a place could be located only by some sign which it bore or by some neighboring landmark. A residence was often most difficult of all to find; and we have seen how Framlingham Gaudy, when in London, had his letters sent, doubtless to be surer of getting them, to a barber's shop which could be recognized by its proximity to a well-known tavern and church. And not only were there these disadvantages, but the General Post Office was the only place in all that vast city where one might post a letter going out of town.

In 1680 William Dockwra, a merchant of the city, undertook to give London relief from this absurd and intolerable situation. Dockwra had formerly been employed in the Custom House. Whether he had heard of Velay's brave attempt in Paris, we cannot say, but probably he had. The rumor is that the idea of this local post for his own city did not originate with him but with Robert Murray, an upholsterer. Nevertheless, Dockwra was the man who had

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the ingenuity and the hardihood to put it into practical shape and launch it. Tremendous courage was undoubtedly required for the undertaking, for the promoter had not only to find the money—considerably more than his own available funds—but he must also brave the determined opposition of the Duke of York, the king's brother, who was now the personal beneficiary of the postal profits.

But Dockwra pressed on, against all obstacles, and on April 1, 1680, skeptical London found itself served by a mail system which has scarcely been equaled even by those of modern times. From Hackney on the northern boundary to Lambeth on the south, from Westminster east to Blackwall,



every block and every house was reached. Placards were posted and advertisements inserted in the newspapers, announcing the location of some four hundred and fifty receiving offices opened that morning, where messengers called for letters every hour. Letters addressed to the country were carried to the General Post Office, those for the city to the sorting offices, of which there were seven in various districts. At these offices the mail was sorted, entered on the records and then sent out for delivery. There were from ten to twelve deliveries a day in the main business district and from four to eight in other sections.

Not only were letters carried, but parcels, provided they did not exceed one pound in weight nor ten pounds in value. Subject to these limitations, any letter or parcel was carried from one part of London to another for a penny;

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and not only that, but if properly wrapped and addressed, it might at the request of the sender, be insured for any amount up to ten pounds. The final innovation which Dockwra introduced was a series of stamps supplied to the receiving offices—one stamp bearing the initial letter of the office and the other the time of day being applied to each letter. These were the first postmarks. In the specimens shown herewith, “Mor. 8” means that the letter or parcel was received at eight o’clock in the morning. “Af. 4” is four o’clock in the afternoon; while the letter *L* in the triangular stamp signifies Lyme Street, where the principal office of the organization was maintained in Dockwra’s dwelling house.

The General Post Office, which until recently had been “at the sign of the Black Swan” in Bishopgate Street, was now located in Lombard Street (where it remained for nearly a century and a half). Its employees numbered only seventy-seven. Throughout the kingdom there were two hundred and twenty-seven postmasters—one hundred and eighty-two in England and Scotland, and forty-five in Ireland. In the whole kingdom the Post Office in 1690 gave employment (not counting riders) to just three hundred and sixteen persons—a number considerably less than those employed by Dockwra in London alone.

No business was done by the penny post on Sundays. On Saturday nights it closed at six in winter and seven in summer; on other nights at nine. Besides Sundays, there were eight holidays for the organization during the year.

Notwithstanding its benefits, the new scheme was greeted with at least the usual amount of carping. Some sensitive Protestants promptly saw in it a popish scheme. The local messenger boys or ticket porters, as they were called, were incensed at the threat to their business, and interfered with the system whenever possible. There were complaints that letters and parcels were not delivered. Dockwra retorted

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that this was due to illegible writing or to the omission of particulars by which the addressees might be identified—signs on their houses, near-by landmarks, etc. Notwithstanding the dispraise, the system was of such tremendous benefit and proved so popular that within a year it was very nearly paying its own way.

The penny post not only benefited London but the crown posts as well; for now every man had a post office just around the corner, and more letters were written than ever before. Within two or three years the enterprise became self-sustaining, and gave promise of considerable profit in future. The Duke of York could not endure this; and in the year that he became king as James II (1685), the penny post was not only taken away from Dockwra and incorporated in the general postal system, but the unfortunate promoter was even mulcted for damages on the ground that he had infringed upon the royal patent.

But Dockwra had his revenge. Within three years James was driven from the throne, and when William and Mary came into their kingdom, Dockwra was granted a pension of five hundred pounds a year for his services. In 1697 he was appointed comptroller of the penny post, at a salary of two hundred pounds per year. Then the scale turned once more, and in 1700 he suffered the fate of Witherings; he lost both his pension and his job because of charges made by various officials. Among the most serious of these charges was that "hee forbids the taking in any handboxes (except very small) and all parcels above a pound." Another was that he took money out of letters, "and makes the office pay for it"; a third that "hee doth what in him lyes to lessen the revenue of the Penny post office, that he may farm it or get it into his own hands." By way of bringing this about, "He stops under spetious pretences most parcells that are taken in, which is great damage to tradesmen by loosing their customers or spoiling their goods, and many times

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hazard the life of the patient when phisick is sent by a doctor or apothecary."

Whether all these specifications were true or not—and most of us have sufficiently observed the workings of envy to be a bit suspicious of some of them—the second on the list of men who have done most for the British Post Office was overthrown by them and passed into oblivion.

CHAPTER IX
BRITISH POSTS TO THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY

Hark, 'tis the twanging horn! O'er yonder bridge
That with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the wintry flood, in which the moon
Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright,
He comes, the herald of a noisy world;
With spattered boots, strapped waist and frozen locks
True to his charge, the close-packed load behind,
Yet careless what he brings—his one concern
Is to conduct it to the destined inn,
And having dropped th' expectant bag, pass on.
He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch,
Cold and yet cheerful; messenger of grief
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some;
To him indifferent, whether grief or joy.

COWPER

IN 1690 began the practice of appointing two joint Postmasters-General to operate the British mail service. Cotton and Frankland, the first two under this régime, held their positions for twenty years. They actually resided in the post-office building in London, and were therefore on the job day and night.

Once out of London in those days, the local postmasters became responsible for the distribution of the mails. The post roads were divided into sections or stages, each under the care of a postmaster whose duty it was to forward the bags over into the next stage. In 1690 there were no letter carriers in any town outside of London. Even in Bristol and Norwich, which ranked next to the capital in size and

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importance, there was only one employee—the postmaster. In some towns he delivered the letters, as many of them as he chose, in others he did not. Salaries were small. Bristol, the second city in England, paid only sixty pounds a year. Some postmasters received no salary at all, but were supposed to live on the entertainment of travelers, the letting out of horses and a bit of profit on guides' fees. Like their fellows on the Continent, they suffered abuses from army officers and other travelers who overdrove, lamed or killed horses, occasionally took them and failed to bring them back. In turn many postmasters tried to get even by pocketing the fees on "by-letters," that is, country letters on which the department could have no check.

It was now illegal for any agency save the post to handle letters, but thousands were being carried secretly, especially between the country and London. Under Charles II and James II there were searchers lurking here and there who stopped suspected persons and vehicles and searched for letters just as customs officers now do for dutiable goods. But the law did not specify such action, and it was stopped when William III (1689-1702) came to the throne. Thereupon the bootlegging of letters increased amain. It was flagrant in the provinces, where men collected and delivered openly; but the greatest quantity of illicit mail was that brought from the country to the edge of London, where it was turned over to the penny post, to be distributed more cheaply than any other agency could do it. Wagoners, higglers, coachmen, all came to town with their pockets crammed with letters and packets, and some even had bags full.

There was so little coöperation on the part of the public with the law that postal authorities were almost in despair. It was at one time proposed to erect barriers on the principal roads at the edge of the city, and there search all vehicles. But King William did not like the principle of that sort of thing, and the idea was abandoned. Finally, the

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Postmasters-General did what seemed to be the wisest thing possible under the circumstances; they grouped large numbers of post offices together, and let them out to contractors. As a sample of these groups, one man's contract comprised sixteen post offices in the counties of Berks, Wilts and Somerset.

The farmer must enforce the postage rates and other laws, but otherwise he might consult his own interest; and it was to his interest to see that the post carried all the letters that were sent, and received pay for the service. Even yet, there was more or less illicit traffic, some of it by the very postriders themselves. One official complained that the gentry "doe give much money to the riders [for services rendered, no doubt] whereby they be very subject to get in liquor, which stopes the males." Correct, no matter which way you spell it!

The postmen often blamed the contractors, claiming that their pay was in arrears. "At Salisbury," reported an inspector, "found the postboys to have carried on vile practices in taking the bye-letters, delivering them in this cittye, especially the Andover riders. Between the 14th and 15th instant found on Richard Kent, one of the Andover riders, five bye-letters, all for this cittye. Upon examination of the fellow, he confessed that he had made it a practice and persisted to continue in it, saying he had not wages from his master." The inspector had Kent whipped and reported him to his employer, "but no regard was had thereto"; and the very next day "the same rider came past, run about the cittye for letters, and was insolent."

These difficulties were hard to overcome, and it was a long time before the private business in letter carrying was much decreased.

The speed of the posts in general at the end of the seventeenth century was only a little better than four miles per hour. This, combined with the fact that, except to Kent and

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the Downs, posts left London only every other day, caused the introduction of "expresses" or mounted special messengers to carry urgent letters. This was the first real special delivery service, more truly special delivery than that offered by the Barcelona carriers two centuries before. It was ridiculously cheap, considering the fact that it required the services of a man and horse traveling at top speed, all for one letter. The fees were only threepence a mile and sixpence a stage, a stage being on the average about twelve miles. Letters traveling by these men were referred to as "flying packetts." But once in a while they did not fly, as is proven by a complaint that "the flying post lay drunke last Friday at Fakenham . . . and had not changed his quarter yesterday as I am informed by one of Scott's men who saw him pittyfully drunke. The cuntry complaines of him."

Newspapers increased in number amazingly in the latter part of the seventeenth century; in fact, they became so numerous and appeared so frequently that they had difficulty in finding news to print; and so hit upon the idea of combining newspaper with letter paper, so that both might be sent through the mails at once. The *Flying Post*, started in 1695, advertised,

If any gentleman has a mind to oblige his country friend with this account of public affairs, he may have it for 2d at the Rising Sun in Cornhill, on a sheet of fine paper; half of which, being blank, he may thereupon write his own business or the material news of the day.

Dawkes's News Letter announces that it "will be done up on good writing paper and blank space left, that any gentleman may write his private business. It will be useful to improve the younger sort in writing a curious hand."

It was in this century that England began mail service by water. A regular post to Ireland had been established in 1635; and later arrangements were made with France for

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mail exchange via Dover and Calais. Shortly thereafter lines were opened to Belgium and Holland, to Spain in 1688 and Portugal in 1705. From other parts of the world letters came in the care of ship captains. To induce the captain to turn these over to the post upon his arrival instead of delivering them himself, he was given one penny for each letter by the post office.

From the time that the postal service began to show any profit, the kings drew upon its revenue to maintain their kinsmen. Charles II began the practice; and in 1694 the list of postal pensioners included the Earl of Rochester, £4,000; Duchess of Cleveland, £4,700; Earl of Bath, £2,500; Duke of Schomburg, £4,000; Duke of Leeds, £3,500; Lord Keeper, £2,000; William Dockwra, £500. Queen Anne (1702-1714) tried to grant the Duke of Marlborough £5,000 a year from the postal revenue, but the House of Commons refused to approve the suggestion, on the ground that the revenues were already "so much reduced by exorbitant grants of the last reign."

The paternalism, the attention to small details which characterized the postal administration of those days seems often ludicrous to us now, but probably much of it was inevitable in an organization still so young, still in such a primitive condition. Among the things which the department heads had to worry about there were the complaints of passengers on the mail packet boats, as witness the letter reproduced below. Note also the refreshingly fraternal attitude of Cotton and Frankland, the first joint Postmasters-General, towards their subordinates:

MR. EDISBURY—The woman whose complaint we herewith send you, having given us much trouble upon the same, we desire you will inquire into the same and see justice done her, believing she may have had her brandy stole from her by the sailors. We are your affectionate friends,

R.C. T.F.

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In other letters these officials scold agents because they do not buy meat cheaply enough nor supplies in the right places ; they suspend a postmaster because he had "stirred up a mutiny between a ship captain and his men, which was unhandsome conduct in him." They brought one Captain Clies to trial because "he had spoken words reflecting on the royal family, which the postmasters-general took particular unkind of him, and can by no means allow." They reprimand another captain for "breaking open the portmanteau of a gentleman-passenger and spoiling him of a parcel of snuff." Their problems were varied and endless.

In 1719 there arose a man who offered to remove some of the graft worries from the government's shoulders by taking over all the posts on the by- and cross-roads in England on contract. This was Ralph Allen, the postmaster at Bath. As a boy Allen had assisted his grandmother, who was a postmistress in Cornwall, and at the time of his proposal to the government was only twenty-six. He further amazed the Postmasters-General by offering six thousand pounds for the contract, whereas in 1719 the by-road letters brought in all told only four thousand pounds. Nevertheless, he had such a good record and made such a fine impression upon the officials by his bearing that he was given a seven-years' contract in 1720.

Of course he had to procure financial assistance in Bath to enable him to set up his business. He had before him a colossal task. Many postmasters were still on very slender pay, and some received nothing more than a copy of a newspaper once a week. These were not disposed to assist the contractor in making his grant a profitable one. Allen designed waybills and vouchers to get a better check on the business, but it was only through ceaseless effort and vigilance on his part that any of these papers were properly filled out.

A new scheme to beat him was also devised. His instruc-

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tions to postmasters were that all dead or undeliverable letters were to be sent to his office at Bath, where allowance would be made for the postage, with which otherwise the postmaster would be charged. The postmasters soon began sending in letters merely not easy to deliver, and bogus letters which were not dead at all, but which, as Allen said of those sent in from Carlisle, were "sham letters all written by one hand and sent from different parts of the kingdom . . . a contrivance by some people in that office to expect money from me for bits of paper never sent by the post."

The postmasters had been allowed to receive their own letters free of postage, which privilege, as might have been expected, they proceeded to abuse. Every mail carried fat packets stuffed with letters for friends and kinsmen, traveling under the postmaster's frank. Allen discouraged this by ruling that none save single letters, that is, letters without enclosure, might pass free, all others being charged with full postage. In various ways postmasters collaborated with each other in cheating the contractor. Allen was kept constantly busy investigating sudden fluctuations in the amounts of mail carried or in the financial returns, in nearly every case finding some evidence of skullduggery.

This concerted chicanery prevented his realizing any profit during his first seven-year contract. In fact, a deficit hung over him throughout the entire period, and at the expiration of the contract in 1727 he had established his service along the roads tributary to no more than four of the six great highways of the kingdom. Nevertheless, he had done better than the government could have done, and it was evident that he was beginning to get the situation in hand; and, marvelous to relate, not all the clamor and caviling of the envious and of those who were trying to bilk him could prevent his getting a renewal of his grant for another seven years.

Allen succeeded because of his marvelous equanimity of

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temperament. It would have been hard to find another man so well qualified for the task. His patience was endless, and not even the most flagrant dishonesty or neglect could ruffle his temper. "'Tis faulty"; "'Tis blameable" were two of his worst rebukes even for double-dealing. He could actually laugh good-naturedly at the clumsiness of some of the attempts to impose upon him. For forty-four years he continued to hold his contract, and it was not solely because he improved the service; for to this day that counts little with either government or public when selfish considerations combine against a man; but because his lovable disposition prevented his making many enemies, and because he cared not that others got credit that should have come to him for an achievement, so long as the thing was accomplished.

By the time his second contract was well under way he had the bypost service well organized and it had begun to show a profit. In 1735 he built a handsome stone mansion on his estate, Prior Park, near Bath, which was still standing at a recent date. There he entertained Pitt, Fielding, Pope, Warburton and many other distinguished guests. For many years before his death he was said to have made at least twelve thousand pounds a year out of his contract; and it is to his credit that he spent a major part of this princely income in benevolence. At the time of the Stuart Rebellion in 1745, he raised a company of volunteers and equipped them at his own cost. Pope wrote of him:

Let humble Allen, with an awkward shame
Do good by stealth and blush to find it fame.

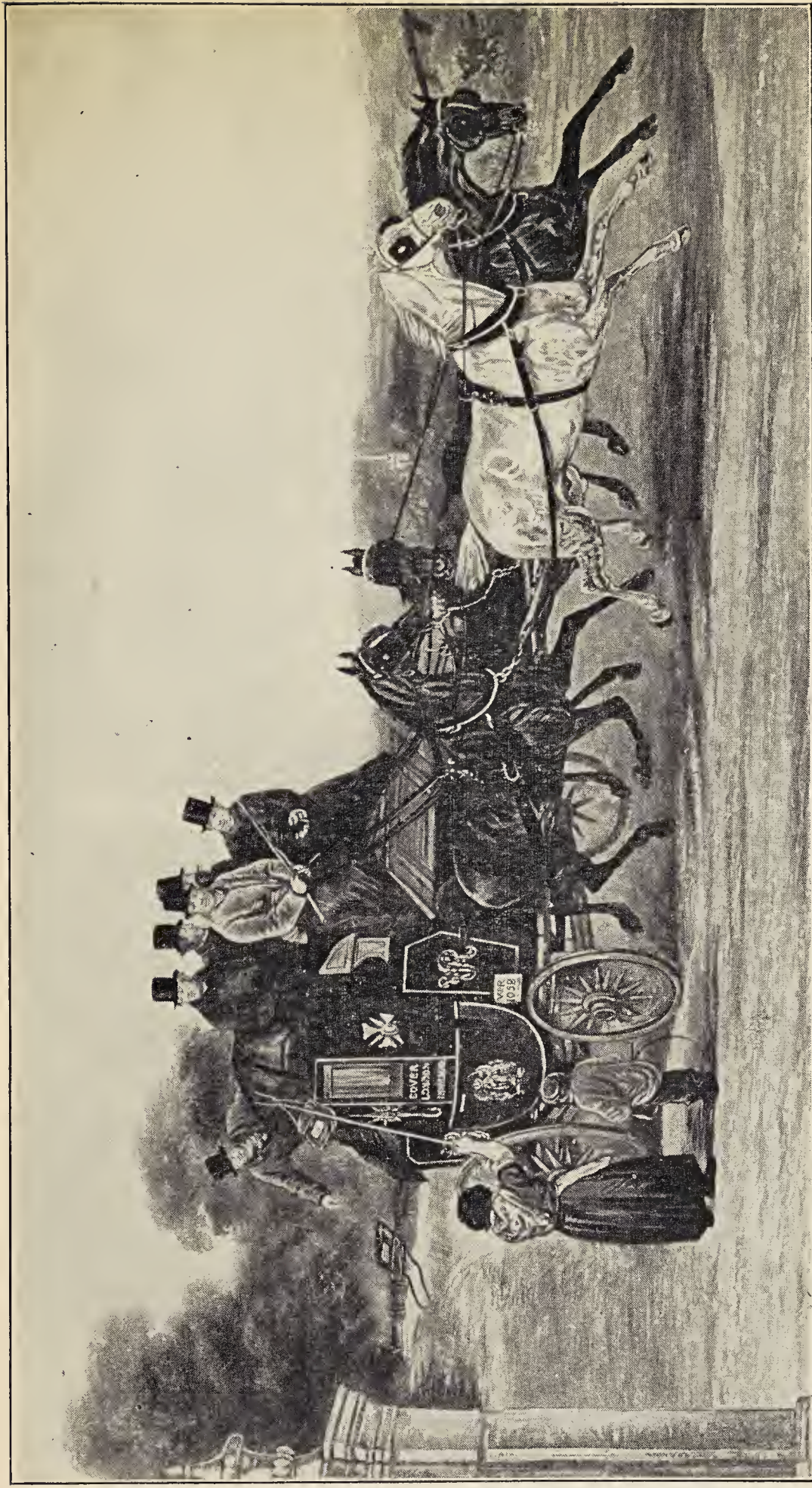
He served for a time as mayor of Bath, and died in 1764, leaving a name still revered in that city, as indeed, in all England. Fielding has preserved a picture of his character, though not his name, in the beloved Squire Allworthy of *Tom Jones*.

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While Allen was handling the byposts so capably, the government showed a tendency to rest on its oars and let him provide all the efficiency. After his death there was no one to take his place; and during the twenty years that followed, "the post office," says Joyce, one of its historians, "sank to a depth which, in England, probably no other public institution, or at all events none that still exists, has ever reached." Corruption gnawed at the vitals of the system. Franking ran riot. Although the rates were raised, the service deteriorated. This was particularly noticeable in London, where the amount to be carried for a penny was reduced from a pound to four ounces, and additional charges were laid for delivery in various quarters of the city.

An occasional improvement, it is true, was accomplished, or rather forced, elsewhere. In Ireland, in the first half of the eighteenth century, mail was carried from Dublin to Cork, Belfast, Limerick and Waterford six days a week, and to Galway, Wexford, Derry and Enniskillen three days a week. There were posts to Killarney, but the government refused to pay anything for these. Likewise at Cork (where the postmaster was paid three pounds a year salary) the letters were delivered by foot messengers who were paid by the newspapers and citizens. Carrick-on-Shannon was the only town in Leitrim to receive mail, which came twice a week. County Mayo saw a mail rider twice a week, who went as far as Castlebar, whence foot posts journeyed on to Newport and Killala. In the county of Sligo there was no post office save at the county town. An effort had been made to establish a city delivery service in Dublin in 1703 by the Countess Dowager of Thanet, who proposed to cover a radius of ten or twelve miles, and charge only a penny per letter. But the Treasury refused permission, and Dublin remained without delivery for seventy years more, an organization finally being established there in 1773.

In Scotland, save for the horse post towards London, all



Old print loaned by Arthur Ackerman & Son, New York

QUICK HANDLING OF MAIL A CENTURY AGO

The guard tosses off the local bag while the postmistress hands him the outgoing bag on a forked stick.

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mails were carried by foot posts and special messengers. In Edinburgh letters had long been delivered by the caddies, equivalent of the London ticket porters, who likewise cried gazettes or public announcements, sold flowers, carried links to light people along the streets at night and ran other errands. They were regulated by the corporation; one finds that an ordinance of 1714 prescribes for them a badge apron of blue linen. Jerry Melford, in Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker*, writes some interesting information regarding them:

There is at Edinburgh a society or corporation of errand-boys called Cadies, who ply the streets at night with paper lanterns, and are very serviceable in carrying messages— These fellows, though shabby in their appearance and rudely familiar in their address, are wonderfully acute. . . . Such is their intelligence, that they know not only every individual of the place, but also every stranger by the time he has been four-and-twenty hours in Edinburgh; and no transaction, even the most private, can escape their notice.

But apparently even these remarkable Mercuries could not supply a satisfying service, for in 1776 one Peter Williamson, proprietor of a coffeehouse near the Parliament building, began forwarding letters and small parcels for the lawmakers and others who did business there. His service was so much appreciated that in the following year he extended it to the entire city, setting up a number of agencies and making hourly collections. His organization served the city for seventeen years, and in 1793 was incorporated into the government system, Williamson being granted a pension of twenty-five pounds a year for his recompense.

Meanwhile various towns in England had become dissatisfied with the service that was being given them. The postmaster, the sole employee of the department, even in many large towns, delivered the letters or not, just as he pleased, and charged what he pleased for the favor. Several

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towns, beginning with Sandwich and Ipswich, now proceeded to law to force the postmasters to deliver letters and to do it free of charge. Ipswich won a point, and several other towns promptly advanced to the fray. After two years' struggle the Court of King's Bench decided that it was obligatory on the post office to deliver letters free of charge.

To the postal authorities the decision seemed to spell ruin. They could combat it in only one way—by procrastination. The postmasters throughout the country occasionally delivered letters, but only after such long delay that most of the addressees were glad to call at the office for them. In the larger cities it was supposed that letter carriers would be appointed; but ten or eleven years after the court decision against them one finds the Postmasters-General rather vaunting themselves upon not having appointed any save in a few places where the inhabitants had absolutely refused to pay delivery charges.

The person who carried mail through the country in those days was called a postboy; and the word was not idly applied, for some of the youths appointed to this responsible position were no more than fourteen years old. They were in general, positive ragamuffins as to their garb, and were mounted on "broken-winded hacks" which rendered any thought of speed impossible. Scotch officials complained of the slowness of the mails on the Great North Road, saying that "every common traveler passes the king's mail on the first road in the kingdom." The post required eighty-seven hours to go from London to Edinburgh, and one hundred and thirty-one hours from Edinburgh to London; letters leaving Edinburgh on Saturday night did not reach London until the following Friday morning.

Naturally, it was unusual to find a boy in his teens with a mature sense of responsibility to the service. John Palmer of Bath, who was now beginning to take much interest in the postal problem, declared that the average postboy, instead of

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protecting the mail against a robber, "was far more apt to be in league with him." Palmer might have been a bit too severe in his judgment, but, says another opinion of the period, "anybody could rob a postboy." One might cite as an honorable exception the boy (his age we know not; it might have been fifty) riding between Manchester and Liverpool, who was slain by the four highwaymen who set upon him at dawn on a September morning in 1791. He must have offered resistance; but others were easier to handle. The French mail outward bound towards Dover was more than once stopped and rifled before it had left the suburbs of London. A twine stretched across the street through which the mail passed was sufficient to throw the boy from his horse; he would pick himself up and calmly retrace his steps, empty-handed, to the post office to report his loss.

Robberies of the post on the Bath road were so habitual that they came to be regarded by the postal authorities as an inevitable condition. The public was strongly advised by them to send all bank notes and bills of exchange in halves in separate envelopes. "There are no other means," they admitted, "of preventing robberies with effect, as it has been proved that the strongest carts that could be made, lined and bound with iron, were soon broken open by a robber."

Proof that some of the postboys were no more youthful than some of our telegraph messenger boys of to-day is found in the statement that the carrier who was robbed by the two highwaymen, Rooke and Howell, in 1792, was a veteran of the staff of Ralph Allen, who had died twenty-eight years before. The two robbers, by the way, were executed at Horsham, and it was the visit of Rooke's mother to the gibbet to collect his bones that furnished the theme of Tennyson's poem, "Rizpah."

Another man of Bath was now destined to effect a reform in the postal system, John Palmer, manager of the theater in that city, and likewise interested in a spermaceti factory.

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It was irritating to Palmer to observe that while he could travel between London and Bath by stagecoach in a single day, his letters which left London on Monday night did not reach Bath until Wednesday afternoon at best. It was likewise a grievance to him that if he or any of his neighbors found it necessary to rush a letter to London, they could do so only by concealing it in a package and sending it by the coach. This was constantly being done, though the cost thereby was two shillings, while fourpence would have carried the letter by the post. Mrs. Thrale's remark in a letter to Dr. Johnson that "I write by the coach the more speedily and effectually" is repeated many times in the letters of the period.

Apparently it had never occurred to the Postmasters-General that they could forward the mails as fast as people traveled, or what is more likely, they did not regard such speed as necessary. But Palmer was too energetic and impatient to endure such a state of things. In 1782 he began an agitation in favor of having the mails carried by coaches, and even increasing the speed of those vehicles up to eight or nine miles per hour. The time of the mails from London to Bristol he figured, would thereby be reduced from thirty-eight to sixteen hours.

His plan was comprehensive. He would have no outside or roof passengers on the coach; a guard, preferably an ex-soldier, armed with two short guns or blunderbusses, at the rear of the vehicle in charge of the mail bags; while the coachman should carry a pair of pistols. Palmer also suggested that the mails, which had been straggling out of London at any hour between midnight and 3 A.M., should all now depart precisely at eight in the evening. They must run on schedule, reach the ends of stages at given times and find the postmasters ready to take the local letters out of the bag and put in the outgoing ones, which he thought they might easily do in a quarter of an hour. He even thought of such details

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as requiring the guard to spend a month in a coach-building shop, learning all about axles, springs and so on, so that he might assist intelligently in case of accident.

Many postal authorities and members of Parliament were violently opposed to the plan when they learned that Pitt, the prime minister, was considering it. They saw "no occasion for such regularity"; some declared that there was "no reason why mails must travel as quickly as passengers." One insisted that it would be impossible for the postmaster to change the mail in fifteen minutes; a half hour or an hour would be necessary. Others objected to the employment of guards, believing that instead of affording protection to the mails, "the crime of murder would be added to that of robbery"; for "when once desperate fellows have determined upon robbery, resistance will lead to murder." The comments of Anthony Todd, the ancient secretary of the department, were delightful. In his opinion, "the arrival of the mail a few hours sooner or later can be of no great consequence."

After two years of discussion and of the pulling and hauling of politics, the plan was accepted by Pitt, and on Monday, August 2, 1784, the first mail coach left Bristol, a few miles beyond Bath, for London, with Palmer there to see it off. On this first trip, the coach could do no better than a scant seven miles per hour for the whole distance; but that broke all records. Shortly afterwards the speed was increased to eight and later to nine. The result was that trips by express riders to Bristol, of which there had been before 1784 as many as two hundred in a year, now ceased altogether. Ten years later the expresses per year for the whole kingdom were fewer than the number which had formerly ridden between London and Bristol alone.

Palmer's plan was put into effect with remarkable rapidity. In March, 1785, mail coaches began to run through Norfolk and Suffolk; and before the year was out, they were operating

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to Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Gloucester, Swansea, Worcester, Birmingham, Holyhead, Portsmouth, Dover and numerous other places. There were already flourishing coach lines to most of the larger towns of the kingdom. Sometimes the old coaches became mail vehicles; sometimes new mail lines were established in competition with the old ones, or where there had been no lines before. It was not until 1786 that the service was extended over the Great North Road to Edinburgh. In 1790 the first mail coaches were installed in Ireland, running from Dublin to Cork and Belfast.

In parts of Scotland and Ireland to which the coaches did not come for many years, special messengers flourished for long afterwards.

Near Inverary [says the poet Campbell, speaking of a vacation in the Highlands about 1800] we regained a spot of comparative civilization and came up with the postboy, whose horse was quietly grazing at some distance, whilst Red Jacket himself was immersed in play with some other lads. "You rascal!" I said to him. "Are you the postboy, and thus spending your time?" "Nae, nae, sir," he answered, "I'm no the post—I'm only an express!"

Which calls to mind instances in our own time and country when the regular mail arrives at 8 A.M., and the special delivery messenger comes dashing up to the door at nine.

When the success of his fast mail idea became a proven fact, Palmer was lauded to the skies. He was fêted in London, Bath and York, the last-named city conferring its freedom on him. Landlords illuminated their inns with transparencies or Chinese shades, as they were called, picturing the old way and the new; one showing the postboy falling an easy victim to robbers, the other, the discomfited bandit foiled in his attack on a coach, shot by the guard and carried off, bound hand and foot. The mail coach bore the legend, "To Trade Expedition and Property Protection." A

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souvenir halfpenny was struck to commemorate the new postal era.

But some details of Palmer's plan did not give entire satisfaction in the capital itself. He had been placed by the post office in entire charge of the coach service, and he decreed that the mails should close at seven in the evening, in order that the coaches might leave at eight. This brought bitter complaints from the London merchants, who pointed out that as business was not over until 3 P.M., they would not be able to have their tea and then answer the day's letters in time to get them in the mail. The postmen, who for seventy years had been going up and down the streets with their bells as late as midnight, if they chose, collecting letters, were likewise disgruntled. They expected a penny tip for each letter they collected, and their extra earnings from this source had averaged twelve shillings a week—nearly all of which they now saw vanishing. Both merchants and postmen were of opinion that the post office should remain open until ten or eleven, at least. But Palmer was convinced that his plan was the better, and he had his way.

That was a busy hour between the closing of the windows and the starting of the coaches. The letters must be sorted, weighed, marked with the amount of postage to be collected, then counted, waybilled and put into the bags, which were then sealed and delivered to the coach guards.

Within a few years after Palmer's plan was put into effect, three hundred and eighty towns which before had had only three deliveries a week, now had one daily. On some roads the mails were being carried in one-third of the former time. But this great improvement was unfortunately coupled with a simultaneous increase in postage of from fifty to one hundred per cent for various distances. Palmer prided himself on having favored this measure, contending that the better service now being offered was worth far more than the increased price. Thereafter, the tendency in postage rates

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was steadily upward. Not until half a century and more later was the government convinced by Rowland Hill that cheap postage is not only a boon to the country, but brings in greater profits than high—a fact which some of our American Congressmen have not yet learned.

Palmer's remuneration for his work consisted of a salary and a percentage of the increase in net revenue which should result from his plan; which scheme presented fine opportunities for differences of opinion and bitterness. He frequently complained of being hindered, thwarted and ill-paid by the department. He was intensely zealous, but irritable and obstinate, and made many enemies. He had not been in office eight years before another official succeeded in creating suspicion against him, and he was dismissed in 1792; but with a pension, however, which was presently increased to three thousand pounds per annum.

CHAPTER X

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAIL COACH

Yoho, past hedges, gates and trees; past cottages and barns and people going home from work! Yoho, past donkey-chaises drawn aside into the ditch, and empty carts with rampant horses held by struggling carters. . . . Yoho, by churches dropped down by themselves in quiet nooks, with rustic burial-grounds about them, where the graves are green and daisies sleep—for it is evening—on the bosoms of the dead. Yoho, past streams in which the cattle cool their feet and where the rushes grow; past paddock-fences, farms and rickyards; past last year's stacks, cut slice by slice away, and showing in the waning light, like ruined gables, old and brown. . . . Yoho, among the gathering shades; making of no account the deep reflections of the trees, but scampering on through light and darkness all the same, as if the light of London, fifty miles away, were quite enough to travel by, and some to spare!

DICKENS

THE function of any state courier service in the Middle Ages was not only to handle dispatches, but to convey government officials engaged upon their sovereign's business. Consequently, when the posts came to be thrown open to public use, it was considered quite as meet for them to carry travelers as letters; and the history of posts all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is also to a considerable extent the history of traveling. The two functions were often spoken of in such a manner as to suggest separate organiza-

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tions, the passenger service being called "the thorough post" and the letter service "the post for the pacquett." A book published in England in 1728 professed to devote one chapter to a description of the postal service; but the writer gave all his space to the carrying of travelers, and forgot entirely to mention the mail.

We have already spoken of a King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, who, in the latter part of the fifteenth century, organized a primitive post service in his kingdom. His couriers rode in light, three-horse vehicles, typically Hungarian, called *kocsi* (pronounced ko-chee), that being the name of the village where they were built. Vehicles have often taken the name of the place where they originated—as witness berlin, landau, sedan chair, Concord coach, Conestoga wagon. From *Kocsi*, then, came the word coach, which (both the name and the vehicle) within two centuries was in use all over Europe, and had been taken to America with some of the early settlers.

The first known mention of a mail coach is found in the statement that when George Johann, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Duke of Bavaria and Count of Veldenz, went to the Reichstag held at Augsburg in 1566, he traveled in a vehicle of his own which was called a "mail coach," and which excited no little interest. Many years passed, however, before the coach came into general use in Europe, the so-called roads offering poor encouragement for the use of wheeled vehicles.

There were postal vehicles in Italy also about the same time, according to Joachim Ernst von Beust of Wittenberg, who wrote a book entitled, *Attempt at a Complete Explanation of the Postal Rules*, which, in those muddled times, sounded like a pretty large order. But von Beust tells such a tall story that we scarcely know what to think of it. He said that he had seen and ridden in Italian postal vehicles called *cambiatures*, whose horses were changed in regular re-

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lays, but that no courier, postilion nor signpost was needed, for the reason that the horses found their way unguided.

Zeiller, a German publicist, writing in 1650, said of the vehicles of his day, "The coaches are like four-post bedsteads on four wheels; the hind wheels are, as a rule, very high, whereas the fore wheels are very low. Instead of springs, there are two vertical iron bars in front and behind, to which broad leather straps or even chains are fastened; between these the body of the coach, which is hung all around with cloth, is suspended."

In 1694 mail coaches took the place of mounted riders in Brandenburg. In 1749 Freiherr von Lilien introduced the first mail coaches into Vienna, and there was a tremendous celebration of the event. The *Wiener Postnachrichten* said of it:

On St. Florian's Day after Easter in the year 1749, the first large Imperial Mail coach, called diligence, gaily decorated with flags and greenery and escorted by thirty postillions clad in new uniforms, drove off from the Imperial Chief Court Post-Office, taking its way through the Imperial Castle, where their Imperial Roman Majesties, attended by several Cavaliers and Ladies of the Court, looked on, much pleased, from the balcony. The procession was led by a gala carriage containing His Grace the Imperial Royal Chief Court and General Post Master of the Hereditary Dominions, Count von Paar, preceded by ten postillions, blowing musically on their horns; this carriage was followed by the Imperial mail coach, drawn by four horses and occupied by several Cavaliers of the Court. . . . Then came a carriage with the officers of the Imperial Court Post-Office, the procession being closed by the remaining postillions, all on horseback and blowing their horns. Thousands of spectators were assembled in front of the Imperial Castle, among them many nobles, as also citizens and all sorts of people, who cheered lustily and threw their hats into the air.

The distinguished escort drove as far as the first relay, then went back to Mariabrunn, where a grand banquet was given

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by the chief court postmaster to their imperial majesties and the postal officials.

If the criticisms of travelers on the Continent as much as seventy-five years later were justified, the advent of these coaches was not much to celebrate—at least, not from the passengers' standpoint. It was complained that in most Continental countries, "the mail vehicles have retained their simple form since the Middle Ages—an ungainly wooden box securely fixed to the axletrees and provided with a canvas tilt. They usually have two benches for the accommodation of travellers; these are hung in leather straps to the sidepoles of the vehicle." The room remaining in the rear was used for mail bags and parcels, but was not partitioned off from the passengers, so that there was no great security.

These must have been much inferior to the elegant coaches in which England took so much pride, and even to the big, lumbering French diligences which developed about the same time. Mention has already been made of the three-horse cart with basketwork body, which the French Revolutionary government built for mail service. These continued in use for many years. Towards the close of the reign of Louis XVIII (1814-1824), "the carriages of the couriers upon the great routes," said a contemporary commentator, "have become much handsomer and more commodious. This was owing to the suggestions of the King, who had compared their tasteless structures with the light construction of the English."

This smaller postal vehicle was gradually metamorphosed into a light, red-painted carriage, on which, about 1840, the postilion sat, strapped to a box which contained the mail, while two passengers sat behind him with their backs to him. A swarm of these coaches left the Place de la Concorde every evening at a fast trot for all quarters of France. The diligence was also used in many sections and at various times—a huge vehicle which at one time developed a *covered* second



THE SPANISH DILIGENCE

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story. The "extra posts," that is, the smaller vehicles, in France were complimented by an American traveler in 1830 for their swiftness—"owing," said he, "not to the goodness of the horses, but to the activity of the postillions and drivers. The postillion never thinks of sleep. As soon as he gets in sight of the stopping place, he gives the signal by cracking his whip, at which everything is immediately got in readiness, so that he starts again in a few minutes."

This writer mentions both postilions and drivers, but one finds it difficult to differentiate between them, as the postilion's whip clearly indicates that he, too, is driving. The word postilion, by the way, was variously used in various countries and periods. Often on the Continent it meant the courier or horse postrider; but in many cases it was applied to the driver who sat on one horse of a team pulling a vehicle. The English stagecoach, after it was fully developed in the eighteenth century, was always driven by a coachman seated on the box; but the French diligence, drawn by four horses, had two postilions, one riding on the near or left-hand horse of each team. Traveling carriages for private use, both in England and on the Continent, were driven by such postilions.

It would be too much of a task to describe all the queer postal vehicles of continental Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The diligences and coaches of France, Spain, Germany, Austria and possibly one or two other countries came to have a considerable comfort for the passenger, but not the speed of the coaches of England. The sledges of Switzerland have already been mentioned. In the Balkan countries there was little comfort for the passenger. A traveler in Wallachia (now Rumania) in 1855 was so jolted and tossed about "among the loose sticks and boards of which the post-cart was composed," while the horses, under the postilion's whip, were galloping madly over stones, ruts and mudholes that he stopped the vehicle, got out

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and took a carriage. He tells of passing the mail at night near Bucharest:

First came a courier with a post-cart and four horses clearing the way, and galloping with the speed of a phantom. A torrent of oaths warned us to pull aside and wait for the mail; we did so, and the furious gallop of the twelve little horses that drew it was soon heard coming through the darkness. Then there was a flashing of lights and it whirled past us (a mere post-cart like the other), with the post-man fast asleep and propped up in a bearskin coat that defied the weather.

Another sketch in the same magazine* pictures the Spanish *correo* or mail cart of the fifties, which was manned by a driver and conductor and carried three or four passengers:

The *correo* travels six miles an hour, stops hardly anywhere for meals—tumbles, jolts, flounders and wallops on—charging you threepence a mile and generally compelling you to leave your baggage behind. The *correo* is always full when you want a place, is punctual to within four hours of the specified time, and is a delightful, fever-breeding, flea-haunted, leg-cramping, bone-breaking conveyance, rather better than an English dung-cart and about as clean. You never have room for five minutes together to stretch your legs, and, to render ease more impossible, the narrow space under the seats is built up with sacks of chopped straw, mule harness, pack-saddles and lumbering, green-rinded melons. The rain pierces the awning above your head, or the sun cuts through it remorselessly. Through the open door that admits no air, the dust sifts in as from a restless pepper-castor, and all the light that ought to reach you is blocked out by the two men who sit on the front seat with the driver. As for axles breaking and horses falling, that is nothing; because you can neither read, sleep, sit nor stand in the purgatory on wheels called in Spanish the *correo*.

Perhaps the most curious postal vehicle ever built was that devised by the Danish government more than a century ago,

* *Household Words*.

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and nicknamed "the ball-post." As will be seen by an accompanying picture, the wood-and-metal case in which the mail was carried was more nearly the shape of an egg than a ball. Of course such a wagon had no intention of carrying passengers.

Even down to the present time an occasional postal diligence may be found in use in Switzerland and bits of neighboring countries in the Alpine region; but it is a quite different and more comfortable vehicle than the diligence of a hundred years ago.

Coaches began to come into public use in England late in the seventeenth century. Not to carry the mails—oh, no!—they were too wild and reckless a conveyance for the king's post; only for the carrying of passengers. Hitherto, the few who traveled had ridden a-horseback or in a carriage, either private or hired. The rate of speed by these methods might in good weather average as high as two or three miles an hour. The fifty-five mile journey from Oxford to London required two days, with an overnight stop at Beaconsfield. Fancy the amazement of the public when the first "flying coach" performed the distance in May, 1669, in one day! By the coaches, traveling was slightly cheaper and one might (theoretically) count on going at a specified time.

Whoever is desirous [said an early announcement] of going between London and York, or York to London, let them repair to the Black Swan in Holborn, or the Black Swan in Coney-street, York, where they will be conveyed in a stage-coach (if God permits) which starts every Thursday at 5 in the morning.

The introduction of coaches was, like every other innovation, denounced as a pernicious evil. It would ruin those who let out hackney horses and vehicles; it would discourage the breeding of saddle horses; the rapid pace would carry travelers past so many inns which had formerly entertained

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them that the landlords would be driven to bankruptcy. Finally, it was too luxurious ; it made people soft.

Those who travel in the coaches [was a dictum announced as scientific] contract an idle habit of body ; become weary and listless when they have rode a few miles, and are then unable to travel on horseback, and not able to endure frost, snow or rain, or to lodge in the fields.

But, as always, there were sybarites and daring persons who took up with the new idea, and coaches increased in number. The coaches of that day were not as large and handsome as those which followed Palmer's innovation. The terms, post coach and post chaise, are first noticed in use shortly after 1700, and both evidently refer to vehicles much smaller and less comfortable than the mail coach of Palmer's day and thereafter. In fact, as late as the first quarter of the nineteenth century, post coach and mail coach are still spoken of as different articles, and the smaller vehicle was then evidently still in existence.

The first coaches ran only in summer, and when they tried to extend their season, they suffered much from bad weather and the dreadful roads. "Is it for a man's health," demanded John Cresset, who issued a pamphlet condemning the coaches as an unmitigated evil, "to travel with tired jades, to be laid fast in foul ways, and forced to wade up to the knees in mire ? and sit in the cold till teams of horses can be sent to pull the coach out ? or the tackle, pearch, or axletree broken, or the rudeness of a surly, dogged, cursing, ill-natured coachman ! No ; let men and women travel on horseback again."

Cresset urged that one coach only be allowed to each shire town, and that to start but once a week, "to go through with the same horses they set forth with, and not to travel above thirty miles a day." Thus regulated, they would do little

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harm, especially if they were not allowed within forty or fifty miles of London.

These early vehicles were called post coaches and post chaises because they used the post horses; but a few of them carried mail at times, and when this was the practice, robbery of the post coaches grew to be a lucrative industry. Turpin, Wild, and most of the other jolly outlaws tried their hand at it. The Bell at Stilton, on the Great North Road, was a favorite resort for highwaymen. John Hawkins, who was hanged at Hounslow in 1722, was one of the leading coach robbers of the century. He and his gang even stopped coaches in Chancery Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields, long before they had got out of London. He took the mail bags of five coaches in one morning, two the next day and one the next. He and his pals liked to drop into the Three Pigeons at Brentford for dinner, then ride on about six o'clock to some point near Hounslow or Colnbrook to wait for a night mail.

One of Dick Turpin's favorite haunts was around Bagshot Heath and Hartford Bridge. He used to stable his horse and dine at the Golden Farmer at Bagshot, from which point he had a choice of at least three roads. He could rob the Falmouth and Devenport postboy, as well as coaches and post chaises on the Basingstoke road, or he could gallop across to another road and hold up mails and passengers going between London, Southampton and the New Forest; or it was not far to the main road between London and Bristol, where pickings were bound to be fat.

Along about 1750 some Manchester merchants set up a line of what they called "flying coaches" to London, intended to run at fully a mile per hour above the usual speed; but we cannot learn whether these continued long. England was so far ahead of Continental countries, however, in passenger transportation, that when the German publicist, Reichard, wrote his travelers' guide in 1784, he said that England was

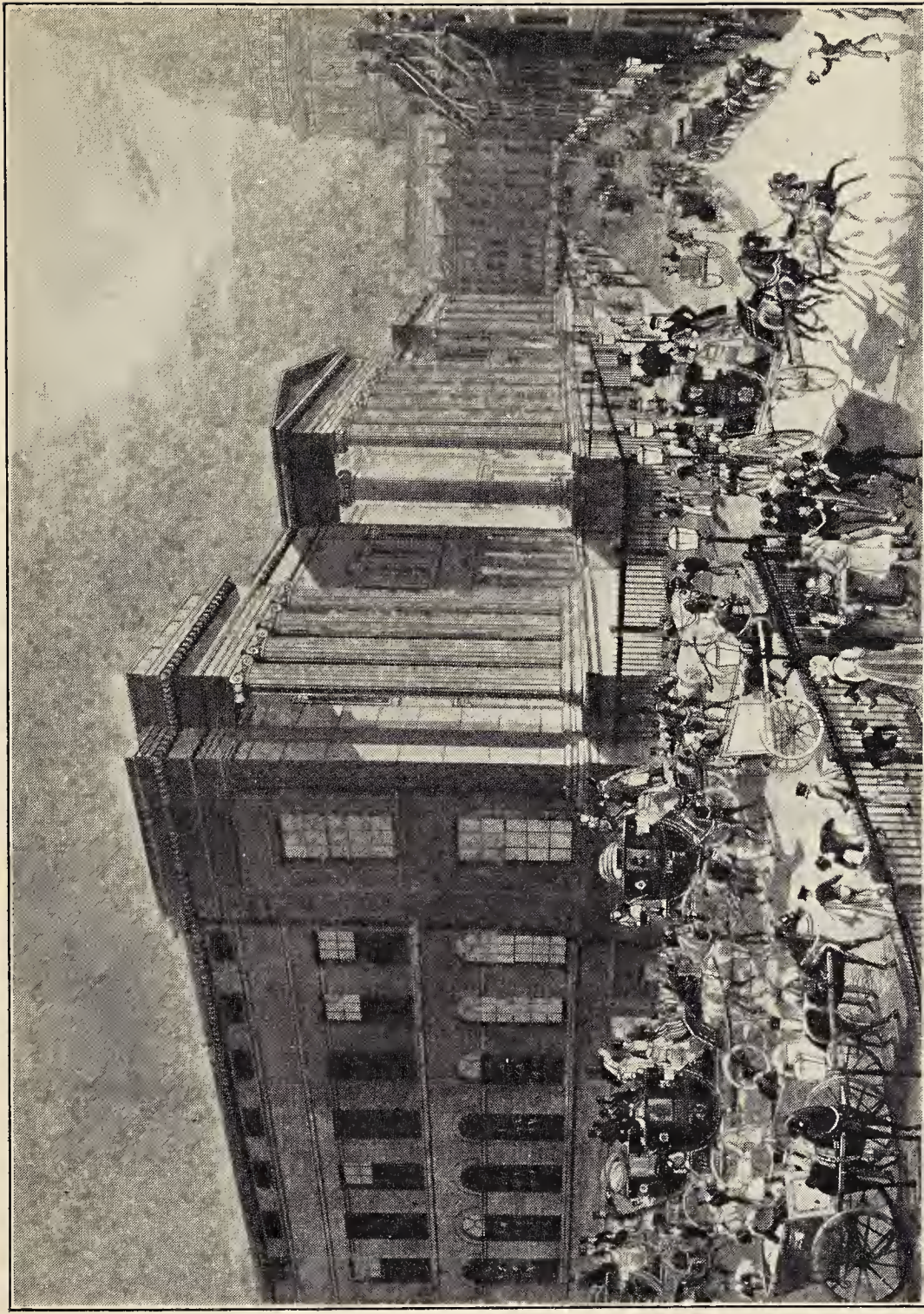
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the only country where carriages might be dispensed with by the traveler. On the Continent, Reichard thought traveling by post, that is, with one's carriage pulled by horses hired from the post, was the cheapest and most comfortable way. He strongly deprecated traveling through a country at too high speed, because you didn't see anything. "It only enriches the postmasters, and leaves the mind and head empty." Precisely what some of us have been trying to tell our twentieth century speed fiends, but it doesn't seem to do any more good now than it did in 1784.

Palmer's increase in coach speed to eight or nine miles an hour aroused general misgiving, not to say alarm. Only a few years before, the time for the mail between London and Edinburgh had been six days; now he reduced it to sixty hours. Many revolted against such recklessness, and predicted an increase in nervous prostration and apoplexy. Lord Chancellor Campbell, talking in after years of this innovation, said:

I was to perform the journey by mail coach to Edinburgh . . . with marvelous velocity, taking only three nights and two days for the whole distance. But this speed was thought to be highly dangerous to the head, independently of all the perils of an overturn, and stories were told of men and women who, having reached London with such celerity, died suddenly of an affectation of the brain. My family and friends were all seriously alarmed for me, and advised me at all events to stay a day at York to recruit myself.

When the mail coaches all began departing simultaneously from the General Post Office in Lombard Street, the event became one of the sights of the metropolis, and large crowds gathered every evening to see it. A few years later, in 1829, when the great new post office in St. Martin's-le-Grand was opened, the spectacle was even more impressive. This evening ceremony was written up and pictured count-



Old print loaned by Arthur Ackerman & Son, New York

MAIL COACHES LEAVING THE GENERAL POST OFFICE, ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND, LONDON

In the left foreground are seen some mail carts

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less times in the periodicals and books of the early nineteenth century, and immortalized in prints and paintings.

De Quincey, a coaching enthusiast who rode on the box with the coachman so often that he was known to all of them, grows lyrical when writing of the days of whip and bugle. He devotes a goodly portion of one of his essays to a description of this evening scene at the Post Office. From boyhood, he says, the coaches exerted a profound influence upon him; it was the coach which first revealed to him "the glory of motion."

In Palmer's first years at the Post Office, the coaches were such ramshackle affairs that breakdowns and upsets were more than a daily occurrence. Palmer made a contract with Besant, a prominent coach builder, to turn out a new vehicle of a patented design, and these were rapidly supplied until by 1792 every mail coach in the kingdom was a product of Besant. With the increase in size and the demand for speed, the number of horses was increased from two to four. These first coaches carried four passengers inside and one on the roof. In later years, from four to six "outsides" were carried.

The guard, with his bell-mouthed, brass-barreled, flint-lock scatter-gun beside him, sat in the rear, directly over and with his feet on the locked lid of the boot, where the mail was carried. Sometimes the boot was filled, and additional bags were placed on the box beside the guard. No passengers might sit with him; to be caught permitting a violation of this rule meant instant dismissal. As an employee of the Post Office, the guard wore the scarlet royal livery. But the coachman, says De Quincey, "obtained the scarlet coat only as an honorary distinction after long or special service."

The instructions of Thomas Hasker, superintendent of mail coaches in the 1790's, give us a delightful insight into the ways of the road in those days. To the guards of the Exeter coaches he says:

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You are not to stop at any place whatever to leave any letters at, but to blow your horn to give the people notice that you have got letters for them; if they do not choose to come out to receive them, don't you get down from your dicky, but take them on to Exeter.

And to the guards on another coach: "If the coachman go into a public house to drink, don't you go with him and make the stop longer, but hurry him out." It had long been the easy-going practice in cold weather for coachman, guard and passengers all to go into the tavern at the relay and have a drink or warm themselves; and it was difficult now to convince the crew of a mail coach that some one should remain and watch its valuable cargo. More than one coach boot was looted while passengers and crew were eating a meal. Grandisson, a notorious mail-coach robber on the Continent, found opportunity to commit all his thefts while the coach was temporarily deserted. The eccentric Huffey White took sixteen bags from the boot of the Leeds mail one night under just such conditions. And how, by the way, in so small an island as Britain, so strongly marked a man as Huffey White went so long uncaught is a deep mystery. "He is scarred with the small-pox in large pits deep in the skin," said a post-office description of him. "He has a squeaking voice; his nose turns up; he has served on board the hulks; he has been transported for life; he is well known at all the police offices." And not only this, but Huffey could not resist wearing "a blue under-coat with gilt buttons, white waistcoat, blue pantaloons and yellow belcher handkerchief round his neck." A man of genius, Mr. White, to go about openly in that make-up, and yet escape arrest for so long.

One weakness most difficult to curb in the guards was that of carrying too much in the boot and on the roof, both of parcel matter and passengers. "In consequence," says a general order, "of several of the guards having been detected

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in carrying meat and vegetables in their mail-box to the amount of 150 pounds weight at a time," the superintendents were directed to meet the coaches unexpectedly and make search. But the superintendents "will please to observe that Mr. Hasker does not wish to be too hard upon the guards. Such a thing as a joint of meat or a couple of fowls or any other article for their own family in moderation he does not wish to debar them from the privilege of carrying." One painful truth was that the guards were carrying quantities of game, some of it illegally killed. This could not be tolerated.

The Post Office also made strong objection to loading the roof of the coach with luggage and parcels. "Such a thing," Hasker concedes, "as a turtle tied on the roof directed to any gentleman once or twice a year might pass unnoticed, but for a constancy cannot be suffered." In later years this objection was withdrawn, and both passengers and luggage jammed the coach roof to capacity.

A jest of recent years as to the flivver and the rough road, in which some one on the rear seat informs the driver that "Miss Blank is no longer with us," was founded on ancient fact. Judge whether you would have liked the outside seat during the spring thaws when you read Hasker's report, just after a spell of weather which had damaged the roads, that "the York coachman and guard were both chucked from their seats going down to Huntingdon last journey, and coming up the guard is lost this morning, supposed from the same cause, as the passengers say he was blowing his horn just before they missed him."

Ah, what a personage the guard was! "Seventy breezy miles a day," says Dickens, "were written in his very whiskers! His manners were a canter; his conversation a round trot." He and the coachman gathered local gossip all along the road and repeated it to those who desired it; and the guard, even more than the coachman, was in touch with

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official centers of intelligence, so that in the eighteenth century and even in the early nineteenth, newspaper editors on his route actually depended upon him for much of their national and foreign news, and came to the post office when he was due to pass, to garner what crumbs of information they could in the few brief minutes of the stop. To men who stood near the road and signaled, he shouted what news he could as the coach whirled by. Fancy how accurate it must have been when repeated!

And the coachman! Well, let Dickens describe the one beside whom Tom Pinch rode from Salisbury to London.

Of all the swells that ever flourished a whip professionally, he might have been elected emperor. He didn't handle his gloves like another man, but put them on—even when he was standing on the pavement, quite detached from the coach—as if the four grays were somehow or other at the ends of the fingers. It was the same with his hat. He did things with his hat which nothing but an unlimited knowledge of horses and the wildest freedom of the road could ever have made him perfect in. Valuable little parcels were brought to him with particular instructions, and he pitched them into his hat and stuck it on again; as if the laws of gravity did not admit of such an event as its being knocked off or blown off.

Let us glance at the picture of another, a real coachman, as drawn by a magazine writer of sixty years ago. Speaking of that halcyon period “when the Comet used to come flashing in, five minutes under the hour, from Piccadilly,” he says, “Let us sketch the Comet of the old days. Tom Brown, the coachman, allows only fifty seconds for changing horses—smart's the word with him. Tom in the neat white hat, the clean doeskin gloves, the well-cut trousers and dapper frock . . . is the pink of jarvies. The coach is a strong, well-built, canary-coloured drag; a bull's head on the doors; a Saracen's head on the hind boot. It carries fourteen

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passengers and goes ten miles an hour guaranteed pace. There is a big, bell-mouthed blunderbuss ready for the Turpin boys; there are two pistols in the cases; there is a lamp on each side of the coach and another gleams out under the footboard."

And among all the men in history or literature—from Jehu down to Budd Doble—who have held whip and rein over flying steed, whose fame is so great or so probably immortal as that of Tony Weller, philosopher and driver of the Belle Sauvage, propounder of the theory that a stagecoachman was a sort of public and privileged character, who might be on "the very amicablest terms with eighty mile o' females, and yet nobody think that he ever means to marry any vun among 'em"?

The revolutionary idea of Mr. Macadam, the Scotch engineer, for surfacing roads with broken stone or gravel, was of great assistance to the mails after 1800. Quite as valuable was the work of Telford, that other great highway engineer, who straightened curves, leveled hills and filled the valleys. Most of the main post roads of the kingdom were macadamized before 1820, and meanwhile Telford was busily correcting their faults in level. Thus coaches were enabled to attain still greater speed, an average of sometimes nine or ten miles an hour, while, as the English boasted, the French mails were able to do only four or five, rarely six. Schedules now became stiffer than ever. "Coachman," asked a nervous passenger of a driver who was dashing through the north of England hills at an alarming rate, "have you no regard for our limbs and lives?" "What are your limbs and lives to me?" was the retort. "I'm behind time!"

Even in London the speed became such that the streets were considered unsafe for pedestrians. When Arthur Clennam (in *Little Dorrit*) came along Aldersgate Street and found men carrying the injured John Baptist Cavaletto

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to a hospital, an old man in the crowd explained that the accident had happened "along of them Mails. They ought to be prosecuted and fined, them Mails. They come a racing out of Lad Lane and Wood Street at twelve or fourteen mile a hour, them Mails do. The only wonder is that people an't killed oftener by them Mails." And other members of the crowd chimed in, "They're a public nuisance, them Mails, sir"; "I see one of 'em pull up within half a inch of a boy, last night"; "Why, a native Englishman is put to it every night of his life, to save his life from them Mails."

So it seems that the mail coachmen often bore the reproach of being hit-and-run drivers; but De Quincey explains that they were forced to be so. When they upset an apple cart or strewed a load of eggs over the street he pictures himself, on the box beside the driver, stretching out his arms and apostrophizing the ruin in the words of Napoleon to Desaix at Marengo, "Ah, wherefore have We not time to weep over you!" "Tied to post-office time," he explains, "with an allowance in some cases of fifty minutes for eleven miles, could the royal mail undertake the offices of sympathy and confidence?"

Horses were now regularly changed in a minute or less time. Separate bags began to be provided for way stations, which the guard hurled off, while the outgoing bag was handed or tossed to him with the coach tooling along at full speed, thus foreshadowing the quick action of the modern railway mail car. Our illustration shows one method of giving him the outgoing bag. Another old print shows the postmaster, whose inn was close beside the road, handing the bag from a second-story window to the speeding guard. At Barnet, north of London, a certain coach was scheduled to pass during the night. One unlucky night the guard's horn was heard, and the sleepy wife of the postmaster arose, threw up the bedroom window and tossed to the roof of the

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coach what she supposed to be the mail bag; but the coming dawn revealed that instead she had sent her husband's leather breeches to London, leaving the postmaster in a most embarrassing situation.

"What finer spectacle could be viewed than the despatch of the mail coaches from the Post-Office?" demands Stanley Harris, author of *Old Coaching Days*. Hundreds, more often thousands, assembled in the streets around the Post Office every evening to see it. De Quincey describes it in connection with "the awful political mission" which the coach fulfilled in his younger days, that of

distributing over the face of the land, like the opening of apocalyptic vials, the heart-shaking news of Trafalgar, of Salamanca, of Vittoria, of Waterloo. These were the harvests that, in the grandeur of their reaping, redeemed the tears and blood in which they had been sown. The mail coach, as the natural organ for publishing those mighty events, became itself a spiritualised and glorified object to an impassioned heart. . . .

The grandest chapter of our experience was on those occasions when we went down from London with the news of victory

—and in the period of ten years from Trafalgar to Waterloo there were many victories. "From eight P.M. to fifteen or twenty minutes later, imagine the mails assembled on parade in Lombard Street." He goes on to explain that the spectacle was a beautiful one even on ordinary nights. On every morning in the year every coach was inspected inch by inch—wheels, axles, poles, linchpins, everything; every part was cleaned, every horse was groomed "as if they belonged to a private gentleman." But this night is a special one—this is a night of victory—

and behold! to the ordinary display, what a heart-shaking addition!—horses, men, carriages, all are dressed in laurels and flowers, oak leaves and ribbons! . . . The spectators, who are

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numerous beyond precedent, express their sympathy by continual hurrahs. Every moment are shouted aloud by post-office servants the great ancestral names of cities known to history through a thousand years—Lincoln, Winchester, Portsmouth, Gloucester, Oxford, York, Newcastle, Bristol, Manchester, Edinburgh, Perth, Glasgow—expressing the grandeur of the empire by the antiquity of its towns, and the grandeur of the mail establishment by the diffusive radiation of its separate missions. Every moment you hear the thunder of lids locked down upon the mail-bags. That sound to each individual mail is the signal for drawing off, which process is the finest part of the entire spectacle. Then come the horses into play;—horses! can these be horses that (unless powerfully reined in) would bound off with the action and gesture of leopards?—What stir!—what sea-like ferment!—what a thundering of wheels, what a trampling of hoofs!—what farewell cheers—what redoubling peals of brotherly congratulation, connecting the name of the particular mail—“Liverpool for ever!”—with the name of the victory—“Badajoz” or “Salamanca.”

He pictures the coach passing on the road a carriage with two or three ladies in it.

“See! see! Look at their laurels! Oh, mamma, there has been a great battle in Spain; and it has been a great victory.” In a moment we are on the point of passing them. We passengers—I on the box and two on the roof behind me—raise our hats, the coachman makes his professional salute with his whip; the guard, even though punctilious on the matter of his dignity as an officer of the Crown, touches his hat.

Such courtesies as that on the road in America to-day would be construed as attempts at flirtation!

When a coach met another which was belated, if the guard of the former happened to be an artist on the key bugle, he teased the lagging one with the tune, “Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be?” De Quincey tells of a certain course on which two coaches started daily at the same minute from

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points six hundred miles apart, and almost invariably met at a bridge which was exactly halfway between the two termini.

During the reign of William IV (1830-1837) twenty-eight coaches left London every night. One of the most famous of the long runs was that of the Quicksilver, which regularly covered the two hundred and sixteen miles down through Exeter to Devonport in twenty-one hours and fourteen minutes, making twenty-three changes of horses—an average of more than ten miles an hour. Some of the interesting names of coaches on the road then were the Royal Union, Tally Ho, Times, Royal Pilot, Umpire, Albion, Emerald, Greyhound, Union Balloon, Independent, Crown Prince, Perseverance, Royal Bruce, Royal Sovereign, Royal Express, Accommodation, Peveril of the Peak, Telegraph, Improved Safety, Night Regulator, True Briton, Highflyer, Dr. Syntax, Subscription, Red Rover, Exquisite.

The annual procession of mail coaches in London, which was a custom begun in 1791, was considered one of the great sights of the year. Vidler, the coach builder who succeeded Besant, began the custom of giving a luncheon to the guards and coachmen on the king's birthday, and this became a memorable function. In 1834 there were twenty-seven coaches in the parade. Almost always, the "dean" of the service, the Bristol Mail, headed the line. At the start from Millbank, "the bells rang out merrily, continuing their rejoicing peals until the coaches arrived at the General Post-Office." In the coaches were packed the wives, daughters or sweethearts of the coachmen, all togged out in their best coal-scuttle bonnets and silk gowns. Some of the guards wound their post horns, others played on the key bugle those airs dear to the lovers of the road: "Over the Hills and Far Away" and "The Days When we Went Gypseying."

But however much one may long for a taste of the old road, one cannot feel enthusiasm over the thought of an

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all-day or all-night ride as an outside passenger in the rain, in a day when coats were not waterproof; and still less amid the snow and sleet of winter. What a struggle there was, by the way, to keep the service going when the wind piled the roads high with drifted snow! Then guards and coachmen often suffered terribly from exposure. On December 26, 1836, only sixteen out of twenty-four coaches succeeded in reaching London. Several were stuck fast in snowdrifts, some were upset. One powerful guard put his shoulders under an overturned coach and righted it unaided.

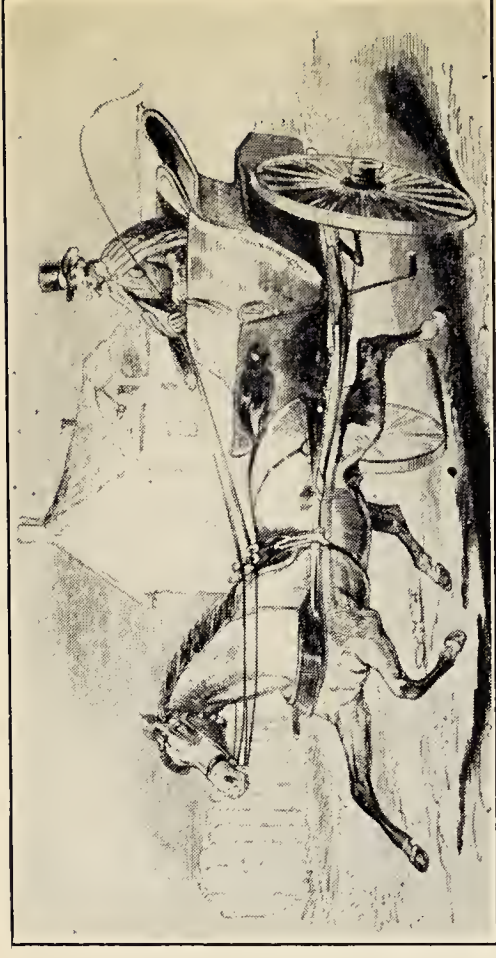
In 1830, for the first time, mail bags began to be sent by railroad train between Liverpool and Manchester—a portent of doom for the mail coach, though many people refused to believe it for a decade afterwards. Edward Sherman, a mail coach contractor of the thirties, was a determined contender against the new transportation. He had bought the big Bull and Mouth Inn in London and remodeled its cellar into a stable, where he kept scores of fine horses. His coaches were among the handsomest on the road, and in those early years when the railroads were capable of no more than twelve or fifteen miles per hour speed at best, his drivers often raced with the trains and not infrequently beat them. With his Red Rover, he endeavored to put the railroad to Manchester out of competition in 1837.

But the struggle of the horse vehicle, like that of the canal, against steam and iron rails was in vain. On May 17, 1838, the last procession of royal mail coaches assembled in Lincoln's Inn Fields, paraded the West End and returned to the post-office yard. By 1844 there was not a mail coach running out of London. The famous Bedford Times was the last coach to clatter over the Great North Road. It was noteworthy for having a clock set in the near or left-hand side of the box, by which people along the road set their timepieces.

As late as 1841 the *Penny Magazine*, lamenting the changes



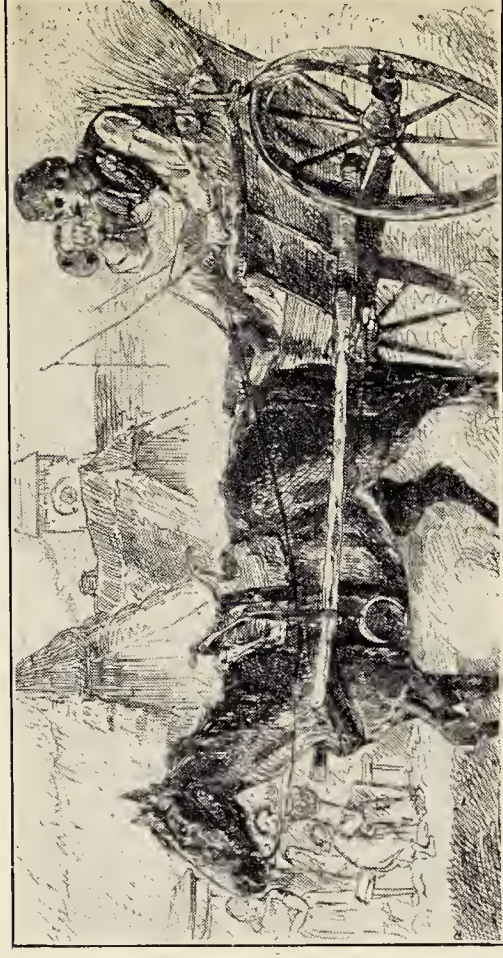
RUSSIAN COURIER, 1845



IRISH MAIL CART, 1840



CANADIAN POST CALASH, 1795



RURAL POSTMAN, HUNGARY, 1865

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then taking place, asserted that the railway could never be as efficient as the old method. By the mail coach, declared the editor, "the means of intercourse reached a state of perfection which we may safely assert will never be paralleled. Some of the mail travelled at the rate of twelve miles an hour, exclusive of stoppages, and yet this headlong rapidity, which became inseparably associated with the transmission of letters, commenced only towards the close of the last century."

In Ireland horses were still drawing the mails at a much later date. Bianconi, the great stagecoach magnate of that island, put his "long cars" of unusual design (Thackeray saw nineteen persons riding in one; six "in the receptacle called the well and one clinging on as if by a miracle at the bar behind") into use in the early nineteenth century, and improved the service. He carried the mails at a low rate, but stipulated that he should not be bound to carry them when they interfered with passenger traffic.

Thackeray, traveling in Ireland in 1842, found many of the coaches in sadly ramshackle condition. Journeying in the Skibbereen Perseverance from Bantry to Cork (it carried him fifty-two miles that day for about eighty-seven cents fare), they passed the Skibbereen Industry—"a wondrous vehicle; there were gaps between every one of the panels; you could see daylight through and through it . . . as little harness as possible to the horses, and as long stages as horses can well endure; ours were each eighteen-mile stages."

As late as 1848 Bianconi had fourteen hundred horses in his service, and in 1860 he still had one thousand horses and was covering between three and four thousand miles of stage routes.

Long after the railroads began to carry the mails the Rothschilds still maintained their horse expresses for the carrying of letters between their great banking houses in Paris, London, Frankfort, Vienna and elsewhere. Anselm

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Mayer Rothschild, head of the Frankfort house, is pictured as frequently arising from bed in the night to peruse important news just brought by an express. These great bankers were often the first to furnish governments with details of a happening, long before the reports reached them through official channels. The couriers of the Rothschilds rode at whirlwind speed, while government riders were prone to ride much shorter and easier stages. The Rothschild expresses between London and Dover far outstripped the mail coach. Their last express over that course in 1842 rode from Dover to Canterbury, fifteen and three-quarter miles, in thirty-three minutes. There he changed horses, and finished the seventy-one-mile ride from Dover to the Surrey end of London Bridge in three hours and forty-seven minutes, or at the rate of eighteen and three-quarter miles per hour.

Nearly half a century after the mail coach had been abolished it was revived again, but this time in modified form as a parcels mail van. The government had long been maintaining a parcel post system, but the railroads' carrying charges had grown so high, mounting in the early eighties to a demand for fifty-five per cent of the postage, that the Post Office decided to handle its parcels on the shorter and more important routes by van. The first started was between London and Brighton, and was drawn by four horses abreast. Old memories were revived by the sight of the guard on the roof with horn and blunderbuss, or shotgun. Two or three years later a three-horse van was started between London and Manchester, and then one between London and Oxford, followed by others. Mail carts met these vans at byroad intersections to distribute parcels among the villages. In 1887 the recollections of the grandsires were stirred by a procession of these vans through London streets, after the manner of the coach parades of many decades ago.

There were numerous other horse vehicles assisting in the

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delivery of the mails in the first half of the nineteenth century; the mail cart and the mail gig, for example, engaged in rural delivery and in collection and delivery in the suburbs of London. The rural mail cart is described by Lord Muntford at Bath, in telling Mr. Pickwick of the reproduction of that vehicle which he had caused to be built for his own driving: "The neatest, prettiest, gracefullest thing that ever ran upon wheels—painted red, with a cream piebald."

"With a real box for the letters, and all complete," said the Honourable Mr. Crushton.

"And a little seat in front, with an iron wail, for the driver," added his Lordship. His idea of a really creamy jest was to put on a postman's crimson coat and drive this cart through the country, causing the people everywhere to rush out of their houses, in the belief that he was the post.

England has had rural free delivery for more than a century; and these mail carts, the equivalent of our R.F.D. wagons of to-day, of course continued in use after mail coaches had disappeared. The driver of the mail gig between Bath and Wells in 1855 told a writer for Chambers's *Journal* that he sometimes carried a ton of mail—heavy bankers' books, lawyers' papers and many newspapers, besides letters, not to speak of money. On one trip he carried fifty thousand pounds in sovereigns; on another forty thousand pounds in Bank of England notes; "and all along the road it was pretty well known that I was bringing the needful to stop the run on the banks." He carried only a brace of pistols. "Lord bless you, sir! Nobody nowadays thinks of attacking the mail—certain to be detected."

High speed was required of these fellows, too. This man must cover twenty-five miles in two hours and a half, and make several stops. Once he collided with a coal cart at a sharp turn, broke his own leg and three ribs and was laid up for six months. On another occasion he ran over a donkey asleep in the road, broke his collar bone and dislo-

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cated a shoulder in the upset. Another man's mare shied, ran into a milestone and then went into a river, killing herself. Another comrade's gig hub struck the wheel of a passing wagon, and the postman was found lying across a neighboring inn sign, dead.

The experience with the sleeping donkey reminds us of another of Thackeray's stories of Ireland. Approaching Ballinasloe, a horse of the coach from Galway suddenly dropped dead. The coachman cut it loose from the others and drove into town with only three—blithely leaving the dead animal squarely in the middle of the road, where another coach presently ran over it in the darkness and was upset and smashed, maiming several passengers and breaking their bones.

In 1840 letters from the "outer circle," extending to twelve miles' distance from the London post office, were brought in on horseback and in mail gigs; and in the inner circle (three miles' distance) by mail carts of foot postmen. The foot carriers sent out to deliver letters in distant parts of the city left the post office in a vehicle much like an omnibus, and were packed in on the same principle as were mail bags; that is, those who went farthest, got into the vehicle first, while those who were to get out first sat nearest the door.

Ah me, as we read the novels of a century ago, we long to turn the clock back and live for just a few years in the old coaching age! Nothing in history seems to have been left behind with such keen regret as was the stage-coach by those who knew it in England. Improved roads and greater speed increased its thrills. It plays a prominent part in the stories of all the early Victorian novelists, but particularly in those of Dickens—Dickens the exuberant, the great exponent of the joy of living. What Dickensian does not recall with keen relish that description of Tom Pinch's summer night journey to London, where the author's

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language, as was his wont in ecstatic moments, fairly falls into blank verse; David Copperfield's trips down to Yarmouth by the mail, and especially that one on the night of the great storm; Nicholas Nickleby's winter journey to Yorkshire with Squeers and his unhappy little victims; and the joyous wanderings of the Pickwick Club withersoever knowledge or the prospect of a jolly Christmas celebration seemed to call?

The modern modes of travelling cannot compare with the mail-coach in grandeur and power [said De Quincey, gloomily]. The vital experience of the glad animal sensibilities made doubts impossible on the question of our speed; we heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it as a thrilling; and this speed was not the product of blind, insensate agencies that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of an animal, in his dilated nostril, spasmodic muscles and echoing hoofs. . . . Ah, reader! When I look back upon those days, it seems to me that all things change or perish. Even thunder and lightning, it pains me to say, are not the thunder and lightning which I seem to remember about the time of Waterloo. Roses, I fear, are degenerating, and without a Red revolution, must come to the dust.

To-day, nothing is so popular a symbol of the olden time, nothing is more often seen on Christmas cards and in other places where fond memories and the spirit of good cheer are invoked than the stagecoach.

CHAPTER XI

THE NEW ERA IN POSTAL SERVICE

Confirmed in my belief that the postal rates were injuriously high, I also became more and more convinced that the fiscal loss was not the most serious injury thus inflicted on the public; that yet more serious evil resulted from the obstruction thus raised to the moral and intellectual progress of the people; and that the Post-Office, if put on a sound footing, would assume the new and important character of a powerful engine of civilization.

SIR ROWLAND HILL

THE post in England in the early nineteenth century presented in its methods an interesting mixture of the old and the new. At the accession of Victoria in 1837 the postman in his scarlet cloth coat with blue lapels and blue paduasoy lining, his blue waistcoat and breeches, white stockings and cockaded hat with gold band, still went about London streets after 5 P.M. in the City and after four in the West End, ringing his bell and collecting letters which were handed to him from house doors. A keen ear and watchfulness were needed to detect his bell among those rung by the dustman, the muffin man, the milkwoman and other functionaries.

The postman expected a penny tip for every newspaper he collected, and this was regarded by the Post Office as his legal perquisite. He would accept a tip when you handed him a letter, too, though this was not so frequently given. As late as 1845 he was mulcting his clients for extra fees for prompt delivery of letters. He would go over his route and first deliver all mail to those who would pay this tip; then

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come back and grudgingly pass out the letters of those who would not pay.

At the General Post Office the free letter boxes closed at 6 P.M. From that time until seven, letters were received only on payment of an extra penny fee; from seven to seven-thirty the fee was sixpence, and from seven-thirty to seven-



Old print from Danish Post Office Department

A EUROPEAN POSTMAN OF 1825

forty-five the penalty was prepayment of postage, plus the extra sixpence charge. At the old post office in Lombard Street, to reach the unpaid-letter boxes and the paid-letter window, patrons had to struggle through long passages and stairways from four to six feet wide; and between six and seven in the evening, from eight to ten thousand people were jammed into these corridors. Pocket-picking, quarrels and fisticuffs were frequent occurrences. The new post office at

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St. Martin's-le-Grand was more commodious, but there were other and grave detriments to the service.

For a century and a half, postage rates had been rising. They were considered high enough, in all conscience, at the beginning of 1812; but that year Vansittart, Chancellor of the Exchequer, demanded that the Post Office assist in paying the expenses of the war with France—say, to the extent of at least two hundred thousand pounds. To accomplish this the authorities could think of no better way than to raise the rates again. By the new schedule a single letter traveling not more than fifteen miles paid fourpence postage. Above that distance the charges were:

From	15 to	20 miles—	5d
From	20 to	30 miles—	6d
From	30 to	50 miles—	7d
From	50 to	80 miles—	8d
From	80 to	120 miles—	9d
From	120 to	170 miles—	10d
From	170 to	230 miles—	11d
From	230 to	300 miles—	12d
From	300 to	400 miles—	13d

Or from eight to twenty-six cents in American money for distances the greatest of which was not quite as much as that from Boston to Baltimore. These rates were much higher than those then in force in America. Double and triple letters, that is, letters containing two or three pieces of paper, paid two and three times these rates.

A writer of the time called attention to the fact that in 1695 one could send a letter from London to York, Liverpool or Plymouth for threepence; in 1813 it cost elevenpence. In 1695 London had a penny post which carried parcels up to one pound in weight; in 1813 and thereafter, the city rates were twopence and threepence, and the weight limit four ounces. There were numerous surcharges through-

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out the kingdom. For example, a single letter of one quarter-ounce weight going from London to Dublin, about three hundred and twenty-five miles, paid one shilling fourpence; of which twopence was steamer postage across the Irish Sea from Holyhead, one penny for crossing the Conway Bridge and another for crossing Telford's bridge across the Menai Straits. One of the ridiculous rules was that letters carried across the Scottish border in a four-wheeled vehicle paid a halfpenny extra, but not if carried across in any other way. Letters crossing to France in the thirties paid threepence "packet postage" between Dover and Calais, in addition to inland postage in both France and England. Some English towns paid an additional penny on each letter, over and above all other charges, merely for the purpose of having the mail coach pass through them. The general result was that the post had become a convenience only for the well-to-do, and that even they avoided the payment of postage whenever and by whatever means possible.

On top of this increase in postage and this complication of surcharges, the number of mail coaches in operation in England and Scotland was, "for economy's sake," greatly reduced. The consequence of all these discouragements was that although the population of the country was steadily increasing, the net revenue of the Post Office began slowly to decline. In 1824 it was £1,438,000; in 1833 it was £1,391,000.

There were two reasons for this. Firstly, people were evading the payment of postal charges; secondly, the rates and regulations were so complicated that the cost of operating the system was far greater than it should have been. To avoid paying postage, friends and acquaintances carried letters, parcels, books and proofs, and carriers made illicit posting a regular business. The post office had not only to weigh letters and figure rates (there were as many as forty possible varieties of inland rates), but to search for enclosures and, worst of all, to ascertain if possible where the letter was

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written and whether it had been carried part way by some one to defraud the Post Office. Each letter must be marked at the destination with the amount of postage due, and the postman must wait at the door to collect it. He sometimes collected twenty pounds or more in a single round. All this rigmarole caused heavy expenditures for time and labor.

The amusing, provoking and maddening things which occurred under these outrageous postal rates were numberless. The "single" letter was one of the most absurd of all human contrivances. As some one has pointed out, one sheet of paper, enclosing a protested note with a notarial certificate affixed to it, became subject to triple postage. A letter containing a pressed violet was a "double" letter and suffered double postage. The height of nonsense was attained in the amounts assessed on manuscripts and packages of documents; in fact, the charges on these were so heavy that they were almost never sent through the post at all. There was, however, an occasional notable exception.

Sir Walter Scott, says his biographer, Hutton, one day received by mail from New York a thick package on which he had to pay five pounds postage. Opening it, he found inside a manuscript entitled *The Cherokee Lover*, written by an American lady, who requested that he read and improve it, write a prologue to it and have it staged at the Drury Lane Theatre, as well as take the necessary steps to secure the copyright for her. Fancy—but no, it can't be fancied—Sir Walter's rage (!) Two weeks later, however, another packet arrived on which Scott paid another five pounds postage. He opened it, and—will the reader believe that it was another copy of *The Cherokee Lover* from the same lady? She wrote that the weather had been so stormy and the mails so uncertain that she feared the first copy might be lost, and so enclosed another. If the great author was enraged before, what must he have been this time? Hutton says that Scott's

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postage bill was seldom less than a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

Dr. Samuel Johnson once had a most doleful experience with the post. A friend in the East Indies sent him a packet of writing of considerable size by a private hand. When the carrier transferred to an English ship at Lisbon, the customs authorities, searching the baggage, seized all letters and packets of writing and turned them over to the Post Office. When the packet was delivered to the doctor in London, as he sat talking to Thrale and Boswell, he was called upon to pay seven pounds ten shillings postage.

In 1837 an author's book manuscript was sent through the mail *by error*, and he was compelled to pay ten pounds postage. The publishing firm explained to him that through the "reprehensible carelessness" of the person to whom it was entrusted, the parcel,

which should have been forwarded, as similar ones always are, by coach, was actually put into the post-office. . . .

The post-office is no more the proper channel through which a packet of this kind should be sent than it should be for the carriage of a bale of cotton.

Yours, etc.

As it was a tedious and difficult process to prepay a letter then, most people let the recipient pay. Of course the "tightwads" always did so. One feared to refuse a letter addressed to one, no matter how much the postage, lest it might be from a good friend or kinsman or might contain some important matter. Consequently, many a letter was received and paid for which the addressee would have preferred to refuse had he known its contents. Among these were the numerous begging letters, the writing of which had grown to be a lucrative trade. James Grant, author of *Sketches in London*, guessed in 1838 that there must be a thousand such letters written per day in the metropolis—

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and the addressee paid the postage on the majority of them.

One shudders to think of the ill-feeling that must have been engendered by persons sending each other costly letters. Sidney Smith took a sly dig at some one who sent him a rather expensive invitation when he wrote, "I cannot, from the bottom of Somersetshire, attend in person, as a letter (two and sixpence postage) yesterday invited me to do." We believe that if we were called upon to pay sixty cents for an invitation we, too, would be apt to feel a bit unresponsive. Dickens, after writing a letter to his friend, Macready, the actor, who was then at Elstree, a suburb of London, added :

P.S.—A dreadful thought has just occurred to me—that this is a quadruple letter, and that Elstree may not be within the twopenny post. Pray Heaven my fears are unfounded!

Something was radically wrong with the Post Office, and prophets were arising in the 1830's who asserted that to save it from bankruptcy the remedy was not to raise the rates, as some were urging, but to lower them. This suggestion was received with amazement, and some Treasury officials and members of Parliament were unable to believe that the innovators were serious, or if so, that they were in their right minds. The talk in favor of lower rates had little effect until Rowland Hill took it up.

Hill was the son of a private school proprietor and teacher, and was born at Kidderminster in 1795. He became an instructor in his father's school at the age of twelve, and later devised improvements in the teaching system which brought him no little fame. Later he became much interested in the printing business, and patented an improved press. A very pretty story has it that he became interested in postal reform in connection with the expense of sending his own love letters. However that may be, it appealed to him as a great error which needed immediate righting.



From a print by Alken

THE BIRMINGHAM MAIL STUCK IN THE SNOW NEAR AYLESBURY

At the left the guard is just starting ahead on horseback with the mail bags

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He was keenly interested in the improvement of the printing press, however, and he debated long and carefully the question whether he should devote his time and energy to that or to the reform of the postal service. The latter seemed a greater need, and he took it up.

He did not seem a very forceful advocate at first. He was a bit timid in manner, and slow and hesitating in speech. But he was zealous and doggedly persistent, and as he became more interested and began to gain hearings with governmental leaders, his confidence increased and his speech became more ready.

Hill and his allies were able to show that evasion of postage and bootlegging of letters extended through all strata of society, all businesses and professions. Seven major methods of conveying letters other than by the post were listed: (1) By carriers or private expresses. (2) In booksellers' parcels. (3) In warehousemen's bales and parcels. (4) In stagecoach parcels. (5) In weavers' bags in the neighborhood of the manufacturing towns. (6) In private boxes, such as those containing food and dainties sent by country folk to their sons in the universities; the whole neighborhood sent letters in these boxes. (7) Under parliamentary and official franks by parties not entitled to their use.

Merchants and bankers—all of whom had warmly taken up Hill's idea for lower postage—came forward voluntarily and unblushingly and admitted that they systematically evaded post-office charges by the use of private expresses and other means. Baring & Company said they sent a box weekly to Liverpool containing two hundred letters. An investigator reported that five-sixths of the letters from Manchester to London do not pass through the post-office." Of Glasgow he said that "the people in that town did not think of using the post for the conveyance of letters; he knew two carriers who carried four times as many letters as the mail did."

Mr. Maury, President of the American Chamber of Com-

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merce in Liverpool, said that when arrangements had been made to establish regular steam navigation between that city and New York, the postmaster at Liverpool, expecting a rush of mail, provided an extra large bag for ship use, but only five letters appeared. There were, however, at least ten thousand letters which went by the same ship, in care of the captain, Maury himself sending two hundred of them.

The sending of letters by a private hand was not without its dangers. Joseph Farington records in his diary in 1810 an incident of a packet of letters, evidently containing some very delicate matter, which a certain person was carrying to a ship captain to be forwarded.

These letters the person left in a Hackney Coach & forgot the number of it.—They were, with precaution, advertised, & in a while a letter was recd. from a person who had them & demanded £3000 for delivering them up. This was refused. A second letter came stating that if the Sum was not paid, they wd. soon be in the hands of a Printer. The person who sent the letters then pd. the £3000—by selling jewels, as it was afterwards discovered.

There were scores of devices for the sending of a few elementary facts by mail without paying for their carriage. One of the commonest media was the newspaper, which at that time the post carried free of charge. One's first thought is that publishing was a highly favored industry, until one learns that not only were the newspapers themselves taxed according to their size, but that the very paper on which they were printed and the advertisements in their columns were subject to special taxes.

The first and most important item of news which members of a family desired to convey to each other related to health. Rowland Hill himself told of how he and his family had formerly notified each other as to this point by sending copies of newspapers. A line drawn under the name of a

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Whig politician meant that the sender was well; under a Tory meant "not so well." There were other signals which told other things. Apparent instructions to the post written on the wrapper were secret messages. Among those which the Post Office detected and for which it assessed fines were, "With speed," "Send soon," "To be punctually forwarded," "With my compliments," "Postman, you be honest and true," "It is requested that this paper be delivered without delay, otherwise a complaint will be made to headquarters"; all of which meant something entirely different.

Business men had code systems based upon the writing of the address. One man's address might be varied thus:

William Henry Perkins, 97 Pump Court, London
William Henry Perkins, Pump Court, London
Wm. Henry Perkins, 97 Pump Court, London
Wm. Henry Perkins, Pump Court, London
William H. Perkins, 97 Pump Court, London
William H. Perkins, Pump Court, London
W. Henry Perkins, 97 Pump Court, London
W. Henry Perkins, Pump Court, London

Will H. Perkins, Wm. H. Perkins, W. H. Perkins, William Perkins and so on were other variants; then a change could be made by putting Mr. before each of these names, or adding Esq. after them. Mr. Perkins's address could be differently stated: "At the sign of the Golden Dog" or "Opposite St. Somebody-or-Other's Church." Actually hundreds of changes might be made, all of which were recorded in a key book and each one having its meaning—the state of the market, bids, quotations, orders, cancellations, notice of arrival and transmission, etc.

The manner of utilizing the collect-on-delivery postage system for the free transmission of news is illustrated by an anecdote told by the poet Coleridge. While traveling in the north of England he halted at a wayside inn just as a post-

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man was offering a letter to the barmaid. The postage was a shilling. Sighing sadly, the girl handed back the letter, saying that she was too poor to pay it. Coleridge, over the girl's objection, insisted upon paying the shilling. When the postman was gone, she opened the letter and showed the poet that it was only a sheet of blank paper; but there were a few hieroglyphics on the back of it, alongside the address, which she had glanced at while she held the letter and which told her the news. "We are so poor," the girl explained, "that we have been forced to invent this method of franking our letters."

Franks were the curse of the mail service then, not only in England, but in America and other countries as well. One-twelfth of the letters sent from London went free. Members of Parliament and government officials by the hundred were authorized to frank letters, and few of them were averse to handing out whole batches of letter paper with their names written thereon to friends and constituents. By one clever scheme of the evaders of postage, a frank was made as elastic as a rubber band. Three or four friends or associates in as many cities would agree to use the name of one of them in their correspondence. *A* at London would then send a letter under a frank to *B* at Dublin, having the cover wafered and sealed so that it could be opened without breaking the seals. *B* would write a letter, enclose it in the same wrapper (for a frank would carry a double as well as a single letter), and without changing the name would mark out his own address and write *C*'s address in Edinburgh, as if *B* had removed to that place. *C* would receive the letter, alleging that *B* was visiting him, write another letter and enclose it to *D* at York. Thus one frank would carry at least three or four letters before it became so covered with addresses as to arouse suspicion.

But there were poor people who had no code systems, who could get no franks, who were too poor to buy newspapers,

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and who were therefore prohibited from correspondence. Such persons often remained in ignorance of the death of a near kinsman only a few miles away because they could not afford to pay the postage on a letter which would have told them of it. The deputy-lieutenant for Somersetshire, who made an investigation in 1837-1838, said:

A person in my parish had a letter from a granddaughter in London, which she could not take up for want of means. She was a pauper, receiving her allowance of half a crown a week. The post-office keeper, at her request, retained the letter for a time, in hopes of her being able to squeeze out the postage from her pittance, a task the woman found impossible. At last a lady gave her a shilling. But by this time the letter had been returned to London.

That led me to inquire further . . . into the effect of dear postage on the poor. The post-master at Banwell said, "My father kept the post-office for many years. He used to trust poor people very often with letters. They generally could not pay the whole charge. He lost many pounds by letting poor people have their letters. We sometimes return them to London, although we frequently keep them for weeks, and when we know the parties, let them have their letters, taking the chance of getting our money. One poor woman offered my sister a silver spoon in pledge till she could raise the money. . . . The letter came from her husband, who was in prison for debt; she had six children and was very badly off."

At Congresbury the postmaster said, "The price of a letter is a great tax on poor people. I sent one charged eightpence to a labouring man about a week ago. It came from his daughter. He first refused it, saying it would take a loaf of bread from his other children, but after hesitating a little time, he paid the money."

An aged woman asked a member of Parliament for a frank for a letter to her brother, who lived at Reading. She herself lived at Hampstead, scarcely forty miles distant; but she had not seen her brother in thirty years and no letters had

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passed between them in that time; not from alienation or indifference, but because they could afford neither traveling expenses nor postage. The member arranged a regular supply of franks for her, and a brisk correspondence sprang up between the old people.

"Sixpence," said another investigator, "is the third of a poor man's daily income; if a gentleman, who had £1,000 a year, or £3 a day, had to pay one-third of his daily income, a sovereign for a letter, how often would he write letters of friendship? Let a gentleman put that to himself. . . ." The net result was that the people of Great Britain were writing, on the average, only three or four letters per person each year.

Hill, after a careful investigation of the subject, came out for a flat rate on letters to all parts of the kingdom; that rate to be one penny, and to be based on the weight of the letter rather than the number of sheets. The suggestion was received with amazement and incredulity on the part of many in the government; but more and more rapidly it began gaining adherents. "Cheap postage!" exclaimed Francis Freeling, secretary of the Post Office, an employee for fifty years and always a high-rate man. "What is this men are talking about? Can it be that all my life I have been in error? If I, then others—others whose behests I have been bound to obey."

In 1837 Hill issued a pamphlet in support of his theory, in which he pointed out that the cost of handling a letter did not vary appreciably according to the distance carried; that, leaving out the overhead expense of the General Post Office system and considering only the primary cost of distribution, not more than one-third of this was chargeable to transportation from town to town; the other two-thirds was the cost of receipt, city delivery, etc. These figures he obtained by including the heavy franked letters and the newspapers. If postage had been paid upon these, the cost of transporting a



EVENING RUSH OF MAIL AT THE LONDON POST OFFICE AFTER THE
COMING OF PENNY POSTAGE



THE PUBLIC LETTER-WRITER OF EARLIER DAYS

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letter would be reduced to nine-hundredths of a penny. The actual transportation cost being so small, he argued that it was absurd to make the charge vary with the distance. In addition to setting the penny rate on letters, he desired to abolish franking and to make newspapers pay postage.

To show the fallacy of the single and double letter idea, the proponents of reform sent to members of Parliament a letter consisting of two small pieces of thin paper, folded to one by two and one-half inches in size and weighing less than seven grains, or the sixtieth part of an ounce, yet it was assessed with double postage; while a sheet of heavy paper twenty by thirty-five inches went for one charge.

That year one hundred and twenty-six million letters had been sent from the London post office. Hill predicted that with penny postage the number would quickly rise to four hundred and eighty million. This was used as an argument against him; Lord Litchfield, one of his most determined opponents, declared that the post office could not handle such a volume of business—he jeeringly pictured its walls bursting under the strain. Hill had an appointment one day with Lord Melbourne, the prime minister, to talk over the question, and was kept waiting for a few minutes, while Melbourne was with some one in another room. As Melbourne greeted Hill, he remarked, “Litchfield has been here. Why a man cannot talk about penny postage without getting into a passion passes my understanding.”

Sir John Burgoyne, who had just paid eleven pounds postage on a packet of papers which should have been sent to him by coach at a cost of a shilling or so, was highly in favor of some change in the system. In one session of Parliament two thousand petitions for the penny post were sent in. So persistent and powerful had been the campaign of Hill and his cohorts that when the bill to establish penny postage was brought before the Commons in August, 1839, it passed by one hundred majority.

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A special office in the Treasury was created to enable Hill to superintend the working out of his plan, and for three years he was an employee of the Treasury, rather than the Post Office. On January 10, 1840, the new rate came into effect throughout the kingdom. Franking was abolished, and a new scheme for the prepayment of postage by means of adhesive stamps came into force. Prepayment was not compulsory, and it grew in favor slowly. In 1850 only half the letters sent had stamps on them; of the balance, forty-six per cent were paid in cash, and four per cent were unpaid. But as the years went by, more and more unpaid letters were refused. In 1859 no less than sixty thousand were rejected in London for this reason.

On the evening of the day when the new rate went into effect the rush of letters at the central post office was prodigious. The building was a commodious one, but its facilities were scarcely equal to the strain. One who saw the evening scramble two or three nights later thus describes it:

People now rush to pay postage as they rush to the pit of a theatre on a crowded night. During the last half hour at the principal offices, the force for taking in letters is far overtaxed. . . . The great hall at St. Martin's-le-Grand was nearly filled with the spectators, marshalled in a line by the police, to watch the crowds pressing, scuffling and fighting to get first to the window. Formerly one window sufficed to receive letters. On this evening six windows, with two receivers at each, were bombarded by applicants. As the last quarter-hour approached and the crowd still thickened, a seventh window was opened, and that none might be turned away, Mr. Bokenham made some other opening and took in letters and money himself. . . . No one failed to get his letter in; more than 3,000 were posted there that evening between 5 and 6 P.M. When the window closed, the mob, delighted at the energy displayed by the officers, gave one cheer for the Post-Office and another for Rowland Hill.

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Another reporter speaks of the "sashless windows being assaulted by showers of papers, flying through the air. Those who cannot reach the foremost row, whiz their packets over the heads of the crowd, sometimes knocking off hats."

Notwithstanding this rush at London, notwithstanding the story that one testy gentleman received so many letters under the new arrangement that he opened only every tenth one and threw the others away unopened, the increase in volume did not at once come up to the five- or six-fold that Hill had expected. Many of the changes which he had proposed to secure a better organization were not adopted. He had desired a great extension of rural distribution and an increase in the number of city deliveries. No day work was done in the London post office, and a letter required on an average fifteen hours to travel from one part of London to another. The execution of his plan, says Hill, was entrusted entirely to men whose official reputation was pledged to its failure and who rejoiced when the number of letters fell short of his expectations. The loss of revenue in the first year was £1,000,000; in the second year it was £900,000. Yet in spite of all difficulties, within two years the number of chargeable letters rose from 75,000,000 to 196,500,000. The illicit carrying of letters was suppressed with little further trouble. Each year the loss in revenue was reduced, and by 1849 the system had reached a paying basis.

It was in 1838 that the money-order office, which had been started in 1792 as a private enterprise by three post-office clerks and had so continued ever since, was incorporated into the royal postal system. Its business, too, was later enormously increased by a reduction of the charges for money orders. A book post rate was established in 1848, and the parcel post in 1883. In 1807 a Mr. Whitbread in a speech in Parliament had remarked that the Post Office ought to receive and care for people's savings; but not for more than half a century was this suggestion acted upon, and

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the postal savings banks opened. This took place in 1861.

Hill was lauded, toasted and presented with costly gifts to an even greater extent than had been Palmer's portion for the introduction of mail coaches. He continued in the postal service as long as he was active, and in 1860 was very justly knighted for his great service, not only to England but to the world; for his reform taught all other civilized countries a salutary lesson, though some of them were slow to act upon it.

CHAPTER XII

THE OVERLAND ROUTE TO INDIA

In the name of the Empress of India, make way,
Oh, lords of the jungle, wherever you roam!
The woods are astir at the close of the day—
We exiles are waiting for letters from home.
Let the robber retreat, let the tiger turn tail—
In the name of the Empress, the Overland Mail!

With a jingle of bells as the dust gathers in
He turns to the footpath that leads up the hill;
The bag on his back and a cloth 'round his chin,
And tucked in his waistband the post-office bill—
"Despatched on this date, as received by the rail
Per runner, two bags of the Overland Mail."

KIPLING

IT was on December 31, 1600, that "The Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading with the East Indies," later known more tersely as the British East India Company, was incorporated by Queen Elizabeth. In 1612 the Company obtained from Emperor Jahangir, successor to Akbar, permission to establish a trading post at Surat. Later they obtained a foothold at Madras, then at Bombay, then at Calcutta, and finally, in the eighteenth century, turned the whole country over to the British government. Meanwhile, the Dutch East India Company was founded in 1602 and took for its field the Indian Archipelago. The Danish East India Company was organized in 1618, and the French in 1664, both securing possession on the Coromandel coast. All these enterprises were of high importance to their mother countries, and strenuous efforts

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were made to maintain communication between the home capital and the colonies thus coming into being. For more than two centuries the only route eastward from Europe for passengers, freight and mail was the long and stormy one around the Cape of Good Hope, which meant a journey of not less than six months, and sometimes more.

There at the Cape was established one of the strangest of all post offices. There was no settlement there then, but ships of the British and Dutch companies formed a practice of stopping in Table Bay regularly and leaving mail to be picked up by the next ship going in the right direction. The letters and packets were left under stones, as large as could conveniently be turned over by a man, and having cut on their upper side, "Look hereunder for letters." Sometimes the name of the ship and commander leaving the batch of letters would be scratched on the stone. A few years ago, while excavations were being made for buildings at Cape Town, some of these stones were turned up. Perhaps—who knows?—old Vanderdecken may have left letters under those very stones before his spirit was condemned to haunt the Cape forever.

A little later a settlement was started by the Dutch at the Cape, and small craft called "advice boats" would put out to passing ships to receive letters and to put on board those left by the last vessel going in the other direction.

As early as 1780 an officer of the British East India service suggested that communication be established by boat to the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and thence by land to the Red Sea or Persian Gulf. The latter route was tried in 1790, but found too difficult. Forty years later, however, a private post was established from Damascus to Bagdad and Bassorah, under the direction of Robert Tod, an English merchant in Bagdad, assisted by the British minister there and under the approval of the Syrian authorities. A messenger was dispatched every twenty days from Damascus,

The Overland Route to India

and rode to Bassorah in from fifteen to twenty-one days. From there letters were forwarded by the first ship to Bombay. Between Damascus and Constantinople, via Aleppo, the mail was carried by the Tartar postmen of Turkey. This line was less dependent upon the sea than others, and more rapid. If good connection was made, a letter might get through from London to Bassorah in seventy days.

In the early nineteenth century steam vessels began to come into use. In 1825 the British East India Company offered a large reward to any steam vessel that would shorten the time required to reach India—around the Cape, of course. Various ones tried it, but the best that any of them could do on the voyage of thirteen thousand and six hundred nautical miles was one hundred and thirteen days, whereas, there were instances of sailing ships doing it in as little as eighty-four days. The engines at that time were too small and weak for the size of the vessels; bad weather deterred them greatly, and the stops at the ports of call were too long.

British merchants in India and the Indian government both made attempts to promote steamer lines to the Red Sea, but failed. The British Parliament tried it, and failed. The difficulties of desert transportation, breakdowns of engines, uncertainties of making connection, all these seemed to make the task well-nigh hopeless.

But, meanwhile, the speed of steamers had been increased—actually thirty per cent in ten years as more powerful engines were built—and a genius had arisen who was destined to solve the problem. Thomas Waghorn was a retired officer of the British navy who for some time had resided in Calcutta. He interested business men in India and England in his plans for bettering the service, and in October, 1829, at the instance of Lord Ellenborough, he set out to try carrying dispatches from England to Bombay. He crossed the Continent to Trieste and took steamer thence to Alex-

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andria, reaching there in twenty-six days. Hurrying by land to Suez, he expected to board there the steamer *Enterprise* from India. But she had not arrived, and he set out to traverse the Red Sea in an open sailing boat, without chart or compass, setting his course by the sun in daylight, and by the polar star at night. He reached the Arab port of Jiddah, six hundred and twenty miles from Suez, in six and a half days. At Jiddah he learned that the *Enterprise* was disabled; but he found a merchant vessel which took him thence to Bombay.

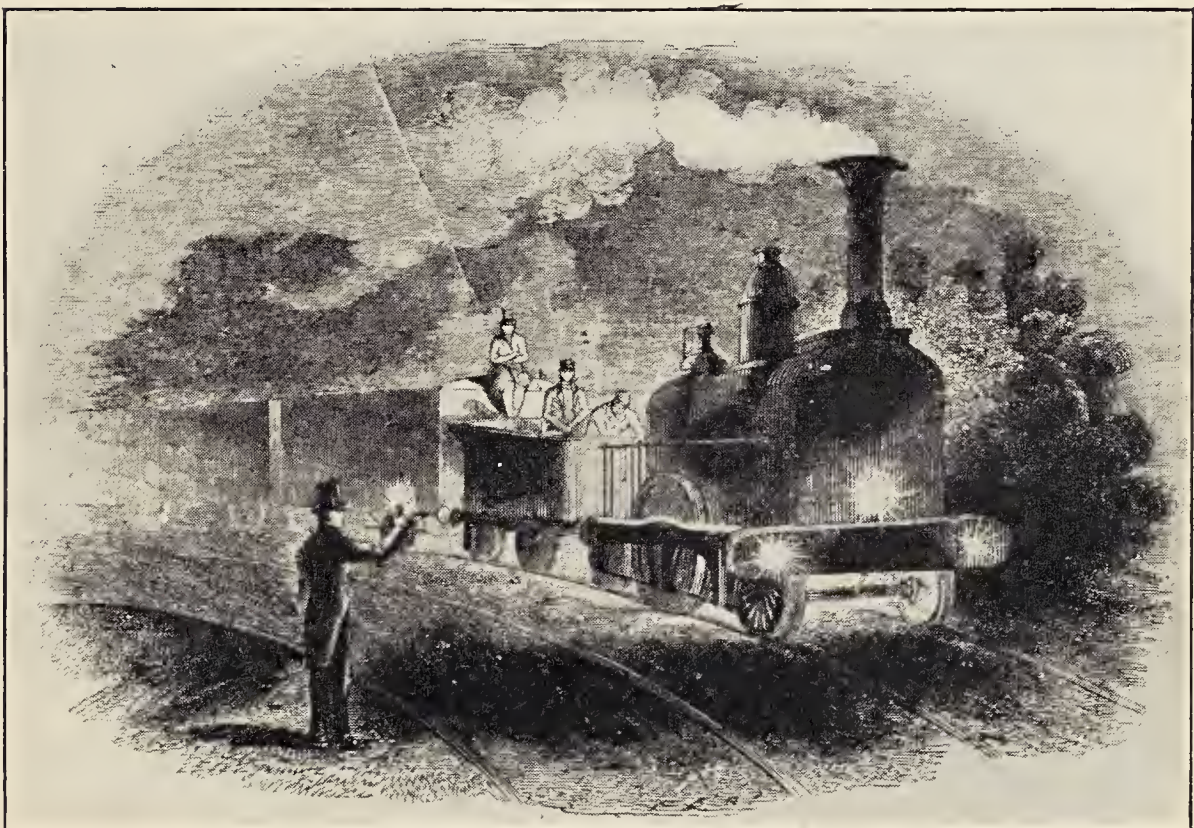
Waghorn was convinced that the Red Sea was the best route to India, and with government and commercial backing he began setting up the machinery of his line. His only land stages were those across France to Marseilles, and across a corner of Egypt from Alexandria to Suez. Of course the Suez Canal had not then been built. He had eight relays for the journey across Egypt, and steamer communication on the Nile and the Canal of Alexandria. In 1835 mail was conveyed by this route for the first time, and in the following year, "by the indefatigable exertions of Lieutenant Waghorn," letters traveled from London to Bombay in the astounding time of sixty days.

Waghorn constantly labored to attain greater speed, and through personal intimacy with Mehemet Ali, Viceroy of Egypt, he gained much assistance for his project in that country. By July, 1841, he had succeeded in putting mail through from London to Bombay in thirty days and ten hours.

England chafed much in 1843 because, by reason of the mail's passing through France, the French got the latest news from India and elsewhere in the Far East at least one day sooner than London, and sometimes two or three days. "The insolent and conceited jealousy of England," fumed a London editor, "which has marked the whole policy of France for some years past renders her people little deserving



THE INDIA OVERLAND MAIL CROSSING FRANCE



SPECIAL TRAIN CARRYING THE INDIA OVERLAND MAIL FROM
FOLKESTONE TO LONDON

The Overland Route to India

of the benefits conferred upon them by the selection of the present route for the conveyance of mails." The writer remarked that Germany was then building railroads much more rapidly than France, and hoped that it would soon be possible to route the Overland Mail through the German states and thus give France a bit of a snub.

A description of the Indian Mail in 1844 shows that when made up at Bombay, the letters were packed in strong iron boxes about two feet square and one and a half deep, securely bound and sealed with lead, stamped with a crown and the words, "General Post-Office, India Mail." There were thirty or forty of these boxes, sometimes more, in a shipment. Advance abstracts of the news and special rush dispatches and Indian newspapers going to English newspaper offices were rushed across France from Marseilles by horse couriers. It is told of these French messengers that "they often ride the whole distance from Marseilles to Calais or Boulogne, fully seven hundred miles, without any rest or refreshment save what they snatch on the horse's back." Truly a marvelous performance! A steamer awaited them at the Channel port, and received the mail, which upon landing in England was rushed by horse express (later by train) to London.

But meanwhile a still more condensed abstract of the news had been telegraphed from Marseilles. A telegraph line was in operation from Marseilles to Paris, and this abstract was sent primarily for the English government, though of course the French "stole" all the news on the way—which was the inevitability that chafed the London editors so much. It must be remembered that the electric telegraph had not yet come into general use. The so-called telegraph by which the Indian news traveled to Paris, far from resembling those of to-day, was merely a sort of semaphore with wooden arms which, moving up and down, wigwagged messages in code from one high point to another within eyeshot. In France

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the semaphores, to make them visible for long distances, were usually set on the tops of church towers, and each station had a telescope to enable the operator to read more accurately the signals of the connecting towers.

From Paris to Boulogne there was no telegraph, and the special matter was carried by a one-horse *malle poste*. At Boulogne the abstract and newspapers, all marked "Tres Passe," were put on a steamer, or, in extreme cases, on a fishing smack, and hurried across to Folkestone. The passage by steamer required anywhere from two and three-quarter hours to fourteen hours, while by sailing vessel it might take from four to forty-eight hours.

Approaching the harbor, the vessel hoisted a certain pennant by day or lights by night to indicate its character and warn the harbor master and railroad men to be in readiness. From the pier the mail was sent by a mail omnibus about a mile to the railroad station "at the breakneck pace of twenty miles an hour, amid the shouts of the company who usually assemble in great number to welcome its arrival."

But if the boat reached Folkestone at night, at low tide and when the weather was rough, there was an exciting scene. A galley—a long boat manned by eight or more stout oarsmen—would put off to the ship, while blue lights from shore warned of its approach and the vessel burned other lights to guide it. Careful maneuvering was necessary when the galley approached the larger craft, lest it be smashed against the side. The captain of the steamer, at the risk of his life, dropped down into the galley with the mail and was rowed to shore, while fishermen with flambeaux stood on the beach to guide the rowers through the surf.

The special train was in readiness, in fact, it might have been waiting three days or more. As soon as the bag was aboard it started for London at its best speed, which sometimes reached thirty-five miles an hour. By day a broad white board across the front of the locomotive signified that

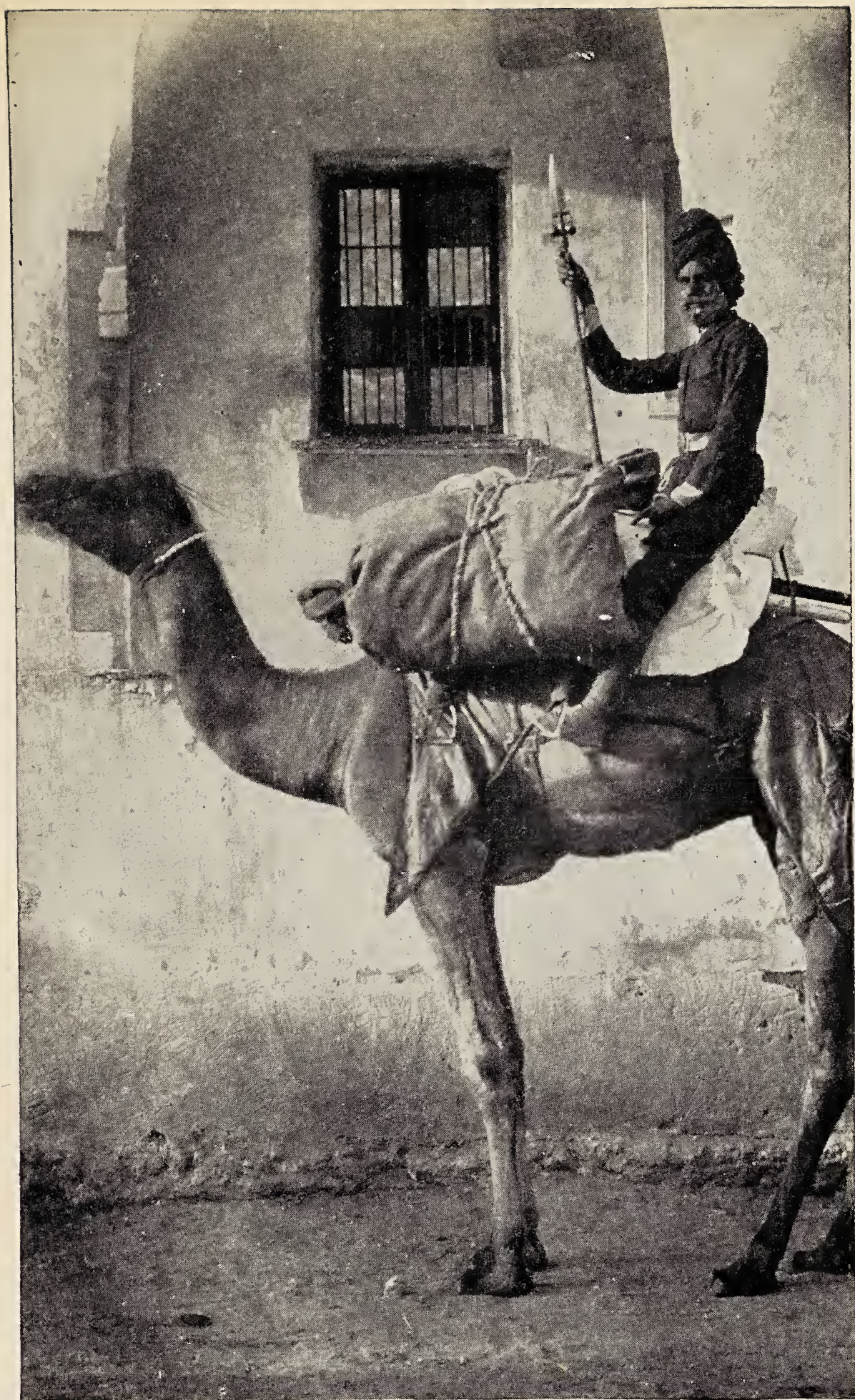


Plate from Paul Gerhard Heurgren, Stockholm

THE CAMEL POST IN BRITISH INDIA, 1927

The Overland Route to India

it was carrying the advance Indian Mail, and must not be hindered. At night three lights in a triangle were its distinguishing marks. Sometimes half a dozen expresses arrived in as many hours. The *Times*, *Herald*, *Chronicle* and other leading London newspapers, as well as prominent stockbrokers, often had their own expresses. Each one cost about one hundred pounds from Marseilles to London—marvelously cheap, as we view it to-day. These abstracts usually came in at least two days ahead of the regular mail.

About 1840, before the main mail became as heavy as it did later, it was being carried across France in a *fourgon*, a light post vehicle, drawn by eight horses. On one unlucky trip it seemed that everything that could possibly happen to a horse vehicle racing against time came all at once. The first disaster was the killing of a child which tried to run across the road at St. Etienne. Farther on the wheels became heated, and four times they caught fire and had to be cooled and greased afresh. Linchpins tumbled out and two wheels came off. Then the *fourgon* collided with a cart, the postilion was thrown from the saddle, seriously injured and had to be left behind. At Neuilly, going up a hill, the leaders revolted against the postilion's hard driving, reared, backed the coach down a bank and upset it. The two couriers jumped for their lives, got out safely, flung themselves on the milling horses, cut the harness and righted the vehicle. This happened in almost identical manner the second time. And yet, as we are assured, the mail reached Boulogne only forty-eight minutes late.

In 1845 the tireless Waghorn in person experimented with a route through Germany instead of France. He was now sending the mail from Suez by express riders to Cairo, eighty-four miles, in eight hours, and thence to Alexandria in fourteen hours more. From Alexandria, on this experimental trip, he took a steamer to Dwino, at the head of the Adriatic near Trieste. The weather was stormy, and it

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took him six days and thirteen hours to make the trip; the time was shortened under better conditions. The authorities at Dwino sent up rockets to assist his boat to shore, and all through Germany he was given every facility. He traveled by post carriage through the mountains via Innsbruck and Ulm to Bruschall, where he reached a railroad. Important personages met him here and there, and special trains were put on for his use. Reaching Mannheim by rail, he traveled thence by boat to Cologne, then by rail again to Ostend, and finally by boat across the strait to Dover, sending up rockets of his own as he approached the shore. His steamer had taken nineteen instead of seventeen days to reach Suez from Bombay, and he had had a slow passage in the Mediterranean, yet he brought the mail through from India to London in twenty-six days, breaking all previous records by three days and more.

Germany and Austria were much interested in his spectacular race. *Fliegende Blätter*, the famous humorous journal of Munich, printed a cartoon, showing Waghorn in full flight, assisted by demons, genii and angels. The route via Trieste was used for a time, but there was some dissatisfaction with it, and presently the mail was traversing France again. Waghorn spent several years in making tests, trying also routes via Genoa and Ancona. In these experiments he exhausted not only his means but his health, and died in 1850, neglected by his government and almost in poverty. It was the competition with Germany which first spurred France to build a railway from Marseilles to Calais; and to Waghorn is even due the early agitation for shorter railway lines through the Alps.

In 1853 the British government contracted with the P. & O. line of steamers to carry the mail from Marseilles. When the Suez Canal was opened in 1869 boats began operating through from Marseilles to Bombay. Even by 1860 the time from England to Australia had been greatly shortened

The Overland Route to India

by this route, mail reaching Melbourne in forty-seven days and Sydney in fifty-one days.

When the Germans besieged Paris in 1870 the Overland Mail detoured through Amiens, Rouen and Tours to Marseilles, entailing a loss of forty hours. But this route was unreliable, and the mail was finally sent behind the German lines through Belgium, over the Brenner Pass to Brindisi, and thence via Italian steamer to Alexandria. But in 1871 the end of the war and the completion of the Mont Cenis Tunnel brought the mails back through France again, at a further saving of time over the Belgian route. To-day the railway service through from the Straits of Dover to the mouth of the Euphrates has put England still more closely in touch with her Indian empire.

CHAPTER XIII

GLIMPSES OF EUROPEAN POSTS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Constitution of the Jesuits and the Postal Service are perhaps the two most marvelous productions of the human intellect.

FRIEDRICH KARL VON MOSER

TO the reader of to-day, who sticks a stamp on a letter, drops it into a slot and forgets it, as thoroughly confident that it will reach its destination (and quickly, too) as he is that he will eat his dinner to-morrow, the tangle of postal systems which existed in Europe in the first half or three-quarters of the nineteenth century, each with its own method, its own scale of rates, its own suspicions and irritations, and with a very erratic sort of coöperation among them all, the wonder would be, not that a letter was delayed, but that it ever got through at all.

Symbols of medievalism still clung to the post system, cheek by jowl with remarkable modern inventions and improvements. In the middle of the century pneumatic tubes were being installed in the great cities of Europe, while in those same countries there were rural postmen who traversed from twenty to forty miles a day on foot, carrying with them many quaint practices of centuries before. The sound of the post horn was still heard all over Europe. Even as late as 1890 the yellow post van was driven through the streets of Berlin by a functionary in shiny hat with flowing plume and a post horn at his back. In some parts of England—between Warwick and Leamington, for example—in the early nineteenth century, the yeoman who carried the

European Posts in the Nineteenth Century

mail on foot was armed with a seventeenth-century sword and a brace of pistols, and might have as many as eight or ten letters in his bag.

In many countries the post horses' tails were still docked in the peculiar style which had originated in the dispatch system of the caliphs of Bagdad. In France the fashion veered from docking to knotting the tails in a particular way; and long after the mails in that country had ceased to be drawn by horses, the sporting devotee who rode to the races in a tallyho coach with postilions, still had his horses' tails carefully knotted in the old postal manner.

We have already spoken of the maze of little states then jostling each other in the Italian peninsula, each with its own mail service. The situation was much the same in the German territories, which were then considered to include Austria. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were no fewer than thirty independent postal systems operating in the German states. Red tape, lack of teamwork, differences in rates and other unfortunate conditions brought about some almost insoluble problems.

In 1850 there were separate post establishments in Prussia, Bavaria, Hanover, Saxony, Baden, Brunswick, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Holstein-Oldenburg, Holstein-Lauenburg and Luxemburg. In Wurttemberg, Hesse-Nassau, the states of the Saxon-Ernestine line, in both the Schwartzenburgs, Waldeck, Lippe-Detmold and the territories of the Hohenzollerns and the Princes of Reuss, the post was still in the hands of the Princes of Thurn and Taxis as a fief. The queer little principality of Lichtenstein had no posts at all. In some other states and cities, the Thurn and Taxis post operated under contract. The Taxis system then had its headquarters, under a postmaster-general, at Frankfort-on-the-Main. As far back as 1800 it had been estimated that the yearly net income of Prince Thurn and Taxis was a million florins.

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When a parcel was sent from Bremen to Munich in 1850, the first state traversed was Hanover, and the weight and distance to Peine must be reckoned, to learn the Hanoverian postage; next came Brunswick's postage from Peine to Jerxheim; then Prussia's from Jerxheim to Schkeuditz; next the share of Saxony from Schkeuditz to Plauen, and finally, Bavaria's from Plauen to Munich. Then you must remember that the rates varied according to the route traveled and the number of times the territories of different governments were entered. Not only this, but when a letter or packet was sent in the evening, the postage was calculated at quite a different rate from that when sent in the morning. A conference held at Dresden in 1848 in an effort to "unscrew the inscrutable" failed to do so because of political complications. But three years later a simplifying agreement was concluded between Prussia and Austria, to which Bavaria presently adhered and soon afterwards the other independent postal administrations. After several years of reluctance the Thurn and Taxis organization also joined the bund.

But many complications were still left. As late as 1860 there were no fewer than seventeen postal administrations in Germany. Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Hanover, Wurttemberg, Brunswick, Baden, the two Mecklenburgs, Oldenburg and Luxemburg had autonomous posts, while in the other states of central Germany, the free town of Frankfurt-on-the-Main and in the Hohenzollern possessions the privilege was in the hands of Prince Thurn and Taxis. In the three Hanse towns the situation was most confusing of all. Besides the post offices of the free towns themselves, there were in Bremen separate post offices belonging to Prussia, Hanover and Thurn and Taxis respectively; in Lübeck to Thurn and Taxis and to Denmark; and in Hamburg to Prussia, Hanover, Thurn and Taxis, Mecklenburg,

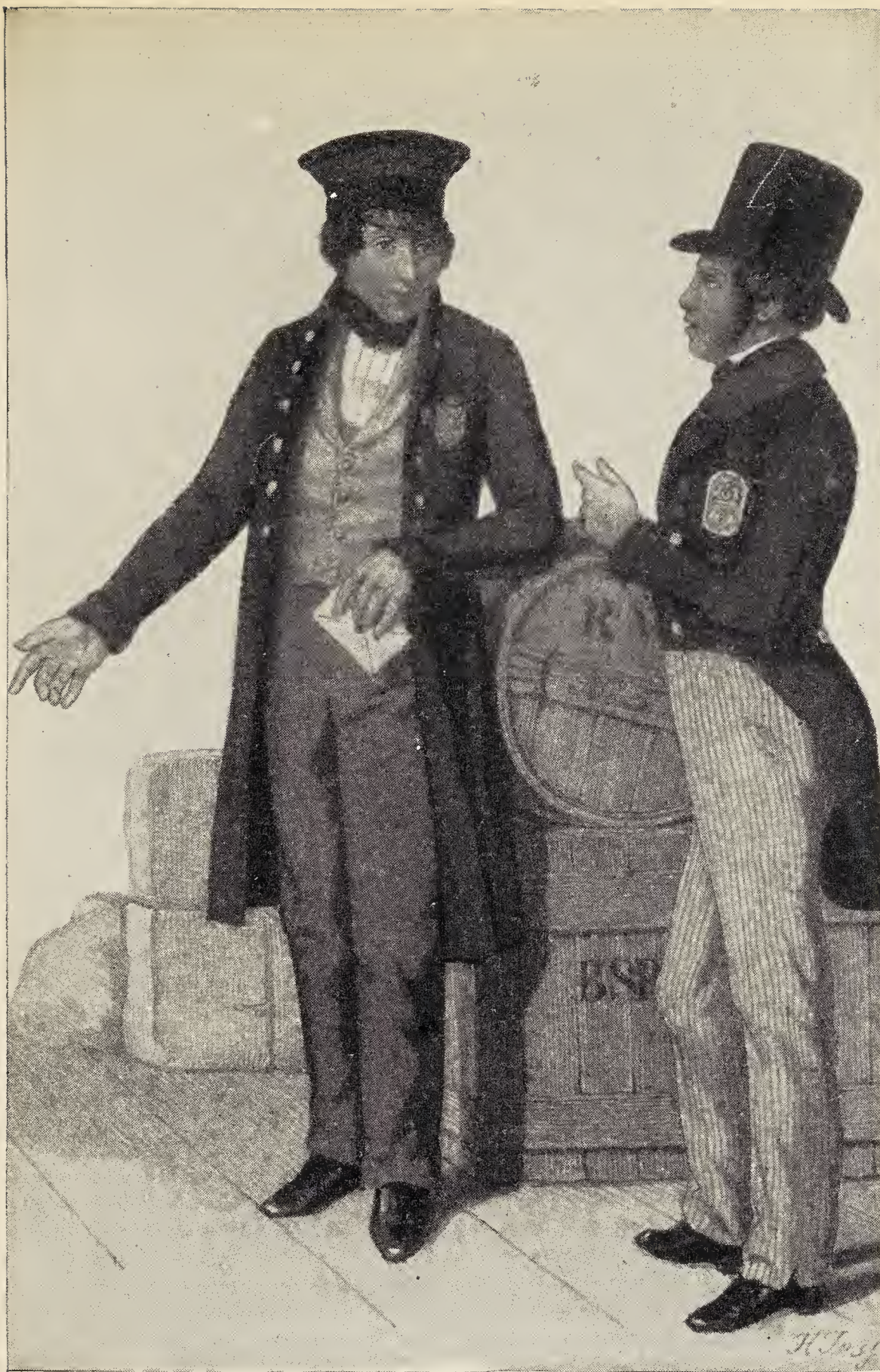


Plate from Paul Gerhard Heurgren, Stockholm

EMPLOYEES OF THE SWEDISH AND GERMAN POSTS IN HAMBURG, 1850

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Sweden and Denmark, each of which offices had its own strictly defined customs and privileges.

Gradually, however, some of the smaller organizations came under Prussian control (as everything else was coming in Germany in the sixties), and in 1867 Prince Thurn and Taxis yielded up his whole postal organization, with buildings and equipment, to the Prussian crown, receiving therefor an indemnity of three million thalers. The North German Confederation, formed in 1866, began to knit the service more closely together, and this work was completed after the Franco-Prussian War, when the German Empire was formed in 1871. Dr. Heinrich Stephan, famous as a postal innovator and historian, was the first imperial postmaster-general. Dr. Stephan had for several years been the privy postal councilor in charge of the Prussian posts, and it is interesting to note that his supplementary title was "Prussian Administrator of the Thurn and Taxis Posts."

There were some quaint customs in the German states—some not to be seen elsewhere. If you wished to communicate with all the postmasters along a certain route, say, to trace an important letter or package, you sent an open letter, which was read by each postmaster in turn. In some of the German states and in other countries, letters could be "recommended," by the payment of a small sum which was noted on the waybill, and which meant that they would travel a little faster than the other mail—perhaps.

The money-order system originated in England in 1792 seems not to have come into use in other countries for many years afterwards. In some of the German states in the forties it became possible to pay a small sum to a postmaster, take a receipt therefor, and send or carry the receipt to another postmaster, who was bound to pay the money—if he had the funds on hand. There was often the stumbling-block. Even in Great Britain—in the Irish portion of it, that is—where the money-order system had been in opera-

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tion for fifty years, Thackeray found this discrepancy in 1842 in a city as large as Cork. He had six five-pound money orders, and made four calls at the post office before he could get the money, receiving on the third call twenty pounds on account, and on the fourth the remaining ten pounds. "I saw poor people, who may have come from the country with their orders, refused payment of an order for some 40s; and a gentleman who tendered a pound note in payment of a foreign letter, told to 'leave his letter and pay some other time.'"

By the French law of 1829 letter and newspaper mail must be taken on every second day at least into communities not provided with postal offices. Boxes were in all these communes, and the carriers took the letters out and post-marked them with a stamp attached to the inside of the box. They carried waybills, on which they must impress the stamp of each box and note the time it was emptied. Mayors of towns gave receipts on these waybills for official letters.

Postmen in general had none too good a reputation in the eighteenth century. M. Gallois, French postal historian, says that "as crooked as a postman" came to be a proverb. Consequently, postal authorities studied how to prevent the postman's laying hands directly upon the letters which he took out of mail boxes. They probably would have interpreted literally the ingenuously figurative expression of the Irishman in Donegal (as quoted by Baines) who, when asked by a stranger, "Is there not a letter box along that road?" replied, "'Tis so, your honor, but it is not until 8 o'clock that it will be robbed."

Distrust of the postman accounts for Belgium's using a wall mail box in which there was a locked inside case, which the collecting carrier took out bodily and carried to the post office with the letters in it, leaving another, an empty case in the box. But he could carry only about four such cases, filled, at once. Then Dr. Wiberg, of Sweden, invented a

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letter box without the inside case, which could be emptied in such a manner that the messenger could not touch the letters. The collection bag had a locked lid which was placed in grooves under the letter box; the key which the messenger carried then opened this lid and the bottom of the box simultaneously, and the letters poured into the bag. As the bag was withdrawn from the grooves, its lid and the bottom of the box closed automatically. These boxes were first used in Sweden in 1869. Later a similar but improved device was invented in Italy, and still another in Germany. Many such boxes are still in use in portions of Europe, Asia and South America. Uncle Sam, by the way, has always trusted his postmen, and has found a comparatively small percentage of them unworthy of the trust. No doubt such boxes might be dispensed with in most parts of the world to-day, and the service be little the worse.

Belgium was one of the first to adopt the pillar type of mail box, now widely used in Europe. Paris set up her first one in 1850, and England installed them in 1855. Pneumatic tubes were first used in the London post office in 1854, and in Paris soon afterwards. They were not installed in Berlin and Vienna until 1875-1876. Their first use was for the transmission of telegrams; for in Europe, and in fact, in most parts of the world save America, the telegraphs are under the control of the post office. In Vienna the tubes were also used at first for special delivery letters. The sender paid a special fee and must mark his letter *Rohrpost* (tubular post), just as we have been more recently marking certain letters "Air Mail."

Some other inventions of those years were not so clever nor so enduring. Just before railroads became serviceable in England one Charles Babbage announced a remarkable idea for the transmission of mail. He would send it from one point to another on long wires sloping downward from church steeples and the tops of buildings, the bags (or

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preferably cylinders) of letters sliding along these wires by gravity!

All over Europe the rural foot postman trod his weary round, in some countries even down to the twentieth century. This was particularly true of mountainous regions—the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Jura, the Black Forest; though in such regions, as well as in the northern countries, the postmen were exposed to great fatigue and hardship in winter. It was in these districts, when the snow was deepest, that some of them traversed their routes on skis, and do yet. In La Vendée, where there were many swamps and ditches, the postmen carried long vaulting poles, as did their predecessors of four or five centuries before. In the Landes, or plains of southwestern France, the strangest development of all was seen—the letter carrier on long stilts striding along the horizon like a huge stork. This equipment was useful in delivering letters to housewives or lodgers in second-story windows, but “it has its disadvantages,” said a commentator gravely, “in the case of covers having to be handed over at the ground floors, and also if the letter carrier has not strictly observed the laws of temperance.”

An interesting item is discovered in 1870 with regard to the letter carriers of Paris, then 510 in number, to the effect that in addition to their salary, which ranged from \$180 to \$240 a year, they drew also an indemnity of \$8 for possible losses in changing money and \$7.20 for wear and tear on their shoes. The postmen must have added an attractive splash of color to the streets of Paris then, for they wore blue-gray trousers, a green coat with red collar and cuffs and a black varnished leather shako with a tri-colored cockade.

What a hardy folk those rural postmen—and postwomen—were! Those in England, for example, achieved some feats of strength and endurance which will appear amazing to this motor-softened generation. William Brockbank, the

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walking post from Manchester to Glossop in Derbyshire, in the first decade of the century, performed his round trip, thirty-two miles, every day save Sunday, and his side trips to houses off the road were believed to increase his tramp to thirty-five or forty miles ; yet he did it all within twelve hours. Brockbank had formerly walked the post between Whitehouse and Ulverston, in Cumberland, where he covered about forty-seven miles daily, and frequently had to wade a small river when the water was high. Another man who did twenty-two miles on weekdays (and more on days when newspapers were delivered to the farmhouses) and sixteen on Sundays, had only two holidays a year. He was a veteran of the wars in India, and on those two days he went to draw his pension, meanwhile paying a substitute to make his round.

Some of the most astounding examples of endurance were found among English postwomen. Baines mentions several. There was Nanny Loughor, who in 1837 gave up her route between Neath and Swansea, Wales, because she was getting a little old. She was then aged ninety-one or ninety-two, had carried the mail for forty-five years, and in that time had walked over ninety thousand miles. In the same year died Ann Price, postwoman between Bristol and Chewmagna, who in twenty-eight years of service had walked at least seventy-four thousand miles. But perhaps the most remarkable of all records was that of Mary Jackson, the postwoman at Bilston, who carried the mail from 1819 to 1870 on every day in the year. In that time she is estimated to have walked two hundred and fifty thousand miles ; and in all the fifty-one years she never missed a day's work save on four Sundays when the service was experimentally suspended.

For many years these English and Irish rural lines were under the inspection of a rather noted personage in Victorian letters—none other than Anthony Trollope, the novelist. For thirty-seven years Mr. Trollope was in the employ of the British post office almost continuously, the greater

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part of the time as a sort of traveling inspector. Such men were paid by the mile, and Trollope's peculiar conception of his official obligations is indicated by his own statement that he always took care to have plenty of mileage. He is said to have done much good work as an inspector, and yet writers of to-day stand aghast at the fact that during the years that he held his postal job he was able to turn out some forty novels, to say nothing of several books of travel, biography and criticism, as well as volumes of short stories. For some time he even edited a magazine as a side line. Notwithstanding his official duties he devoted three hours a day to writing, stinting himself to two hundred and fifty words every fifteen minutes, so that he was able to produce nearly one hundred thousand words in a month.

One might fill a volume with anecdotes of the rustic postmen. The carrier between the villages of St. Austell and Higher Sticker, in Cornwall, a century ago, was a little shrimp of a man who seemed to require a tremendous while to cover his short route. The authorities investigated, and found that he was stopping on his rounds to shave or cut hair for any of his clients who desired that service. There were similar instances on the Continent. Until very recent years the rural postmen in Württemberg were allowed to do private errands for their clients. The postman usually lived at the village farthest from the post office. On his inbound trip in the morning, collecting letters, he was given many orders by clients along the road, sometimes even to buy fresh meat and groceries in the town. He did this and brought the goods out in the afternoon when he brought his mail.

In Ireland the village postmen were often mere children. At one, in the fifties, the mail was distributed by a boy of ten who could neither read nor write. When he started out for his rounds, the postmistress put the mail for one of the three streets of the village in his right hand, for another in his left, and for the third in his mouth; and people along the



Sweden, 1840 (with lamp for short winter days)



St. Petersburg, Russia, 1850



Germany, 1860



Rural England, 1870

NINETEENTH CENTURY POSTMEN

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streets picked out their own letters from one of the three bundles, those on the third street frequently finding their letters deeply pitted with the semicircular imprint of childish teeth. A visitor to another village tells of the youthful postman sending in three letters by a servant with the statement that "there was a pinny due on one of 'em." All three letters were stamped, so the lady of the house went out and said, "Why, Tommy, there's no penny due on any of these letters."

"Maybe not, ma'am," replied Tommy, unabashed, "but Mrs. Minahan [the postmistress] bade me get a pinny somewhere on one of 'em, and I thought I'd thry if 'twas your honor."

Dickens contributes an amusing bit regarding an Italian rustic postman in 1844. Writing to a friend from Albaro, near Genoa, he said,

You had better address me, "Poste Restante, Genoa," as the Albaro postman gets drunk, and when he has lost letters and is sober, sheds tears—which is affecting, but hardly satisfactory.

To Clarkson Stanfield, he wrote on the same day,

When you write to me, my dear Stanny, address Poste Restante, Genoa. I remain out here until the end of September and send in for my letters daily. There is a postman for this place, but he gets drunk and loses the letters; after which he calls to say so and to fall upon his knees. About three weeks ago I caught him at a wineshop near here, playing bowls in the garden. It was then about five o'clock in the afternoon, and he had been airing a newspaper addressed to me since nine o'clock in the morning.

In Russia as late as the seventies, the mail in the rural districts was handled by a privately operated postal organization. Only the cities and large towns were served by the government post. The village and country people outnumbered the urban dwellers by ten to one, but because of their

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ignorance, they wrote no more letters. The country post was allowed to issue stamps, but they must be different in design from the government stamps. As late as 1880 there were two postal districts in Siberia which received mail only twice a year.

An English sojourner in Russia in 1857, writing* of the city mail service in St. Petersburg, says:

Prepayment of a letter from St. Petersburg to England involves attendance on at least three separate departments of the Imperial Post-Office, and the administration of at least one bribe to a dingy official with a stand-up collar to his napless coat. . . . Those who have ever been constrained to do business with a Russian government clerk of the lower grades will remember that, conspicuous by the side of the blotting pad (under which you slipped the rouble notes) there was always a sodden blue handkerchief, the which, rolled up into a ball or twisted into a thong or waved wide like a piratical flag, served alternately as a sign of content, a gesture of refusal or an emblem of defiance. You couldn't prepay your letter without this azure semaphore being put through the whole of its paces; unless, indeed, previous to attending the post-office you took the precaution of asking some mercantile friend to affix the stamp of his firm to your envelope. Then the official handkerchief assumed the spherical or satisfied stage; and you had, moreover, the satisfaction of knowing that the stamp of the firm might stand you in good stead, in that your letter might not be opened and read before being despatched.

You seldom fail (purely through official oversight, of course) to be overcharged.

I used to live on the Cadetten-Linie, on the island of Wassili-Ostrow. . . . The Postman was one of the fiercest little men, with one of the fiercest and largest cocked hats I ever saw. Don't let me forget his sword, with rusty leather scabbard and brazen hilt. The furious charge of a general on Plumstead Marshes was something like the pace of the Russian postman. . . . It was an impressive spectacle to see him bring up the

* In *All the Year Round*, 1869.

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little pony short before the gate of the hotel, dismount, look proudly around and beckon to some passing Ivan Ivanovitch to hold his steed. It was a grand sound to hear him thundering up the stone stairs, his scabbard bumping against his spurs and his spurs clanking against the stones, and his gloves, hanging from a steel ring in his belt, playing rub-a-dub on the leather pouch which held the letters—my letters, my newspapers, when they hadn't been confiscated—with all the interesting paragraphs neatly daubed out with black paint by the censor. And when this martial postman handed you a letter, you treated him to liquor and gave him copecks.

The St. Petersburg Poste Restante (General Delivery) in 1856 was one of the oddest institutions imaginable. It was a prudent course to take your landlord or some Russian friend with you to vouch for your respectability. In any case you were bound to produce your passport or rather, your "permission to sojourn." . . . When divers functionaries—all of the type of him with the blotting pad and the blue handkerchief—were quite satisfied that you were not a forger of rouble notes or an incendiary, their suspicions gave way to the most unbounded confidence. You were ushered into a large room; a sack of letters from every quarter of the globe was bundled out upon the table, and you were invited to try if you could make out anything that belonged to you.

You reach the post-office in Madrid [the same writer goes on] by a dirty little street branching from the Puerta del Sol. The entrance is in a dingy little alley, lined with those agreeable, blackened stone walls, relieved by dungeon-like barred windows, common in the cities of northern Spain. Opposite the post-office door are a few little bookstalls, where you may buy cheap stationery; and there, too, in a little hutch, in aspect between a sentry box and a cobbler's stall, used to sit a public scribe who, for the consideration of a few reals, would write letters for those whose education had been neglected.

I don't think I ever knew such a black, dirty and decayed staircase as that of the Madrid post-office—save perhaps that of the Monte de Piete, in Paris. You ascended, as it seemed, several flights, meeting on the way male and female phantoms, shrouded in cloaks or in mantillas. The mingled odour of to-

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bacco smoke, of garlic and of Spain—for Spain has its peculiar though indescribable odour—was remarkable. The odds were rather against you when you visited the Poste Restante, that the occasion might be a feast or a fast day. In either case, the office opened very late and closed very early; and the hour selected for your own application was usually the wrong one. If the postal machine were in gear, you pushed aside a green baize door and entered a long, low apartment with a vaulted roof of stone. Stuck against the whitewashed walls were huge placards covered with names, more or less illegible. Knots of soldiers in undress stood calmly contemplating those lists. I don't think a tithe of the starers expected any letters; it was only another way of passing the time. A group of shovel-hatted priests would be gravely scanning another list; a party of black-hooded women would be gossiping before a third; and all would be smoking.

You wandered into another vaulted room, and there you found your own lists—those of the “*estrangeros*.” In the way of reading those lists, madness lay. The schedules belonging to several months hung side by side. There were names repeated thrice over, names crossed out, names blotted, names altered, names jabbed at with a penknife by someone in a sportive mood. The arrangement of names was alphabetical, but arbitrary. The system of indexing was equally mysterious. I will suppose your name to be Septimus Terminus Optimus Penn. To all this your correspondent in England has foolishly added the complimentary “*Esquire*.” Under the circumstances, the best thing to do was to look for yourself under the head of “*Esquire*.” Failing in this quest, you might try Optimus and Terminus, and so on up to Penn. When you found yourself, a number was affixed to you. At one end of the apartment was a grating, and behind that grating sat an old gentleman in a striped dressing gown and a black velvet skull cap, smoking a cigarito. . . . You spoke him kindly and called him “*Caballero*.” He bowed profoundly and returned your compliment. Then you told him your number and handed your passport through the bars. He looked at the number and he looked at the passport. Then he kindled another cigarito; then in a pre-occupied manner he began the perusal of a leading article in the *Epoca* of that morning. Then after a season, remembering

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you, he arose, offered you a thousand apologies and went away, out of the cage altogether, retiring into some back den—whether to look for your letters or to drink his chocolate or to offer his orisons to San Jago de Compostella, is uncertain. By this time there were generally two or three free and independent Britons clamouring at the bars; the Briton who threatened to write to the *Times*; the Briton who declared that he should place the whole matter in the hands of the British ambassador; and the persistent Briton who simply clung to the grate or battered at the doorstep with an umbrella, crying, “Hi! Mossoo! Donnez-moi mon letter. Larrup, Milk-street, Cheapside, à Londres. Donnez-moi! Look alive, will you!” At last the old gentleman returned, lighted another cigarito and began to look for your letters.

In Switzerland the mails and passenger traffic were inseparable until the coming of automobiles and the building of motor roads. To-day every sort of mail delivery is still used in Switzerland, including the automobile, coach, wagon, pack horse and foot post, varying according to conditions. In 1874 the records show that the posts (Swiss and Italian) carried 26,366 persons over the Simplon Pass, 29,683 over the Bernhardin, 25,533 over the Splügen, and 71,697 over the Saint Gotthard. The posthouse at Andermatt, at the foot of the Saint Gotthard, was provided at that time with one hundred and fifty horses, of which fifty were not infrequently sent with one post train over the mountain. Coaches seating eight or ten and drawn by six horses were used there in summer, but from October to May, when snow covered the top of the passes, sledges were used, built entirely of wood and open, to prevent the passengers being injured by glass in case of accident. The winter traffic was often so heavy that a hundred passengers would be booked on a single trip. Then there would be an imposing caravan; the chief driver in the first sledge, a postilion on each of the others, the conductor on the last one, the luggage and mail sleds in the middle of the train.

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Sometimes the weather baffled even the hardy mountaineers for a few days. Charles Lever, the novelist, writing from Riedenberg, near Bregenz, Tyrol, in 1847, said, "Avalanches have fallen on every side of us—fifty feet of snow is lying in the Innsbruck road; the mail from Italy is four days due, and even Switzerland—usually regular—is two days behind time." At such times big snowplows, drawn by dozens of horses, were put in action as rapidly as possible, to break out the roads.

It was in the Alps that the traditional old-time country postmaster of the Continent was seen at his best. Many writers of the past have dwelt lovingly on his quaint and picturesque character and setting. He was always the innkeeper, of course, and was postmaster in the medieval sense that he was required to keep from ten to twenty horses in his stable for the use of the passing vehicles; and if they were not sufficient, he could seize from his neighbors as many as were needed—payment of course being given. The posthouse became the chief inn of the village, and many of the best houses of entertainment to be found in the Austrian Alps are apt to be called by that name by the inhabitants to this day.

The postmaster's job was almost hereditary. He was an authority on horses, and he had social contacts not possible to ordinary persons—with English milords, Italian counts and German princes, for example, who often stopped to dine or spend the night at his place—which, of course, made him likewise an authority on politics and the ways of the world. The post office or posthouse was therefore the center of the social life of the community. Everybody went there to hear or to tell news. The peasants liked to lounge in the guards' and coachmen's common room, where they heard tales of adventure and daring on the road and the latest news from the great near-by cities—Berne, Vienna, Trieste, Innsbruck, Verona.



Plate from Paul Gerhard Heurgren, Stockholm

DANISH POSTMAN, EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY, COLLECTING
POSTAGE ON A LETTER

Note the gong with which he announced his coming

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Mention of Charles Lever reminds us that from his letters one may gain a hint of the erratic course of the mails in the first half of the nineteenth century. Lever spent a considerable portion of his life on the Continent; and on several occasions when he had entrusted to the mail monthly installments of a novel, addressed to his publishers in Dublin, London or Edinburgh, they were lost, even at times when he had sent them, supposedly for safety, in an ambassador's mail bag. "How the MS went astray," he writes of an installment of *Harry Lorrequer* from Brussels in 1839, "I cannot ascertain, and it is now needless to inquire. . . . I myself saw it put in the Embassy's bag and know that it must have arrived at the P. O." And a few months later he added, "All kinds of misfortunes and delays have befallen my unlucky MSS of late, and whether the public is ever to see the end of *Harry Lorrequer* is more than I can tell."

The tragedy of these losses was that as soon as poor Lever had written one of these numbers, he promptly forgot the minor incidents and dialogues, and had to reconstruct them all anew. Writing from Florence in 1864 he says, "*Luttrell* No. 5, that is for next month, has been in part lost, and I am in a fearful hobble about it—I must rewrite, without any recollection of where, what or how." During revolutionary troubles in 1849, he wrote from Lucca, "All post communications with England ceased for eleven days during the Genoa insurrection. The mail-boats were twice burned going from this, and I (with my accustomed luck) lost a whole number of *Roland Cashel*—twelve days' work, of which I have, of course, not a note or memorandum."

There was one instance of service, however, which amazed Lever. While he was consul at Spezzia, his publishers at Dublin wrote his name on a letter, but forgot to add the address, and somehow the missive got into the American mail. Reaching New York, the post office there promptly forwarded it to him at Spezzia. "How any one in New

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York knew my address," he marveled, "is difficult to explain."

The Balkan countries, while languishing under Turkish rule, with Austria and Italy seizing bits of territory whenever they could, had wretched postal service, or none at all. A writer in *Household Words* in 1855 describes the post office in a little coast town in that quarter of Europe, a town which he disguises under the name of Cattivacane.

When any of my friends in England [says he] chose to remember that I was alive and out foreign, and were good enough to write to me, their letters, after having paid a prodigious outward postage in England—after having been fumigated with nauseous odors in abominable lazarettos, scorched, branded with hot irons, blistered, punctured with needles and cut through and through with scissors, greased, stamped all over with illegible gibberish in many-coloured inks, blackened, defaced and crumpled—were, long after the time of their due delivery, brought to Cattivacane, when, if they were not thrown overboard in the passage from the ship to the shore, or eaten by the rats or stolen, or used by the sailors for pipe-lights, they were transferred to our little post-office, to await the claim of the addressees. There were no postmen in the wretched little place; and all that could be done was to make periodical voyages of discovery to the post-office and hunt diligently among the letters, rags, shavings, sacks and baskets, till you found the missive addressed to you. Plenty of letters addressed to Malta, Syria, Gallipoli and even Constantinople, were always to be found among our letters; as to newspapers, they were kicking about the Levant for months—mere flotsam and jetsam of journalism. Report did say that if a resident of Cattivacane were disappointed in receiving an expected communication, he not infrequently indemnified himself by appropriating as many letters and newspapers, addressed to other places, as he could find.

There were almost as many difficulties in sending letters as in receiving them. You had first to hunt for the postmaster, who, when he was not asleep, was hunting fleas, or smoking, or fuddling himself with rosolio, but lying and swindling always. . . . Much screaming in that horrible compound of Italian, French,

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Romaic, Turkish and thieves' Latin, known as *Lingua Franca*; much violent gesticulation; much expectoration; and in many cases, threats of personal violence were always necessary before a letter could be definitely posted at *Cattivacane*. The altercations I have had with that postmaster make me tingle with irritation even now. He cheated like a thimble-rigger. . . . His chief grievance was the (by him considered undue) amount of manuscript that I chose to send. It used to cause him the most exquisite annoyance to have to receive and weigh my letters—to see through the transparent envelope the close-set lines crossed and recrossed—to feel how many sheets of thin paper, closely written upon, there were inside, and yet to know that the amount chargeable upon this vast quantity of written matter was ridiculously small. . . . His favorite objection—dancing, screaming and pawing the air meanwhile—was "*Troppa scrittura, Kyrie Ingliz—Troppa scrittura!*" (too much writing, Oh, English lord—too much writing!) by which I suppose he meant that I wrote too small a hand to satisfy the revenue of the government; there was too much writing for too little money.

Greece is an example of the Balkan benightedness of those days. For centuries under Turkish rule the country had had practically no post at all. Not until the struggle for independence in the early nineteenth century began to look hopeful did the senate and military authorities undertake the organization of courier services which had a certain connection and regularity. In 1828 a postal communication was established between the Island of *Ægina*, then the seat of government, and some parts of the mainland. A postmaster-general was appointed and four post offices were established, which number was increased in the following year to eleven. There were sixteen messengers on horseback and nine on foot; a modest beginning, but one which was bravely followed up.

Notwithstanding their bad mail service, the Turks made a great insistence upon speed on a few main routes, probably because the riders were also carrying important government

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matter. A writer for the *Illustrated London News*, wishing to go from Constantinople to Aleppo in 1853, secured permission to travel with the post, for safety. Going to the post office for the start, he found it in a great bustle and uproar, as piles of letters—Greek, Arabic, Turkish and what not—were separated and packed in their bags, senders were squabbling over the amount of postage charged on their letters, and riders were departing. The mail being packed and officially sealed, the Tartar messenger took charge of it and the caravan set out—five horse loads of mail squired by a *surigee* or groom, then the Tartar courier, and the passengers in the rear. Through the streets they went at a trot or gallop, the Tartar yelling and flourishing his whip. There was no slackening for three hours and a half, when the first relay station was reached, and there was only five minutes' rest while saddles and mail were being changed to fresh horses, the former ones always being completely fagged at the end of a stage. It was now night, and the second stage of three hours ended at 4 A.M. with the driver fresh and gleeful, but his passengers staggering from weariness. They had two hours of rest here before starting again. The driver occasionally paused half an hour for meals, but never more than two hours for sleep, though he sometimes slept twice a day. The travelers begged him to slow up a bit, but he assured them that it was as much as his life was worth to arrive late. Meanwhile, he seemed to be enjoying himself tremendously—singing, shouting and never appearing tired. They reached Aleppo in nine and a half days, whereas caravans took forty-five days for the journey. The courier had fifteen days for rest before starting back towards Constantinople, during which time he did little but eat, drink and sleep.

Through all the muddling, the discord and the negligence pictured in this chapter, the postal systems of Europe were nevertheless moving slowly but surely towards greater efficiency and better coöperation. It was the United States,



THE POST ARRIVING AT UDVIK, NORWAY



From Swiss Post Office Department

MONUMENT AT BERNE COMMEMORATING THE FOUNDING OF THE UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION

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under the leadership of Postmaster-General Montgomery Blair, which had the honor in 1863 of being first to propose a world postal agreement. Friction and poor service had brought most of the nations of Europe into a frame of mind highly receptive to such a suggestion; and a conference sat at Paris from May 11th to June 9th of that year to discuss the question. Delegates were there from France, Great Britain, Prussia, Austria, the Hanse towns of Germany, Italy, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Portugal, Switzerland, Costa Rica, the United States, and even from Hawaii, then under the rule of the progressive young monarch, Kamehameha IV. This conference did not bring about a definite union, but certain elementary rules with regard to paid and unpaid letters, registered letters and one or two other items, were agreed upon, though they were not binding upon the conferees. This meeting had, however, a considerable influence in bringing the nations together more profitably eleven years later.

A hint of the international difficulties then existing is found in the memoirs of Elihu B. Washburne, minister to France from 1869 to 1877. He was of opinion that there are no more difficult people in the world than the French. Our postal and telegraph treaties with France had expired when he went to Paris, and postal arrangements with France existed during his whole service there. Time and again he tried to negotiate, but always they chaffered and equivocated and offered insurmountable obstacles. Meanwhile the French government charged exorbitant rates of postage and dictated the terms on which mail to America entered and left the country. Buiness men in America raged, but there was no relief until the Universal Postal Union came into being.

Dr. Stephan, director-general of the German posts, offered suggestions for another conference in 1869-1870, but the war with France halted the project. At the close of the war he resumed his efforts, and Switzerland having agreed

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to play the host, a meeting was called for September, 1873, but Russia was not ready, and the affair was postponed to the following year. In September, 1874, the conference met at Berne, and after only twenty-four days of deliberation, was able to sign, on October 9th, the treaty which brought the Universal Postal Union into being. The contracting countries (ranked according to the division of the expenses of the Union) were:

First class—Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain,
Italy, Russia, Turkey, United States of America

Second class—Spain

Third class—Belgium, Egypt, Netherlands, Rumania, Sweden

Fourth class—Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland

Fifth class—Greece, Serbia

Sixth class—Luxembourg

The French plenipotentiary would not sign the treaty on the spot, saying that the National Assembly would have to pass upon it. But six months later France gave her assent with certain stipulations, which were eventually agreed to by the other signatories. Meanwhile Montenegro had been admitted to the Union, and Persia sent word that she was organizing a postal service, so that she might get in. In 1876 British India and the French colonies came in. As European governments controlled large portions of Asia and Africa, the Union included the greater part of the world; and year by year other countries continued to subscribe to the treaty until scarcely a square mile was left through which the mails did not pass under this great civilizing agreement.

CHAPTER XIV

EARLY COLONIAL POSTS IN AMERICA

"Where is the postman, Nancy, with the New England mail?"

How slow he was a-comin', along the Indian trail.
And some poor fellows never came; in solitude
they fell

Before the savage tomahawk, with none to tell the
tale.

JOHN H. YATES, in *The Postal Record*

IN 1652 Samuel Symonds of Ipswich, Massachusetts, wrote to a friend:

I cannot say but its beside my intentions that I write not more frequently unto you; I can onely plead this for my excuse (so farr as it will goe)—the uncertainty when and how to convey letters.

For several decades after the first European colonists landed in America, this uncertainty existed, the only means of sending letters to and fro being as primitive as were those of Europe in the Middle Ages. In the French-Spanish settlements in Florida and Louisiana, as well as in those of the English and Dutch farther north on the Atlantic coast, servants, acquaintances, merchants, peddlers, friendly Indians and ship captains were the casual postmen, some making a charge for their services, some carrying letters free. As our postal system and our nation had their beginning in the English and Dutch colonies, we shall give our attention largely to those.

Some of the most important correspondence of these set-

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lements was that with the mother countries, England and Holland. In early days this was usually entrusted to the captains of private vessels, unless one knew some other officer or member of the crew. Shipmasters about to sail from either England or America often hung up a bag in some tavern in which letters for the other side were to be deposited. The fee was by custom established at a penny for a single letter, and twopence for a double letter or parcel. Whenever a vessel arrived from England, all those families who hoped for letters from the other side (as well as some who had no reason to expect any at all) sent some member on board to inquire for mail. The letters not thus delivered were taken by the captain to a coffeehouse near the wharf, where they lay on a table, to be fingered over, speculated upon and greasy-thumb-marked again and again by lunchers and idlers until they were finally called for. Persons from the country who visited the seaport called not only for their own mail but for that of all in their neighborhood; this in turn, when not delivered in person, was left at the house of some prominent minister or magistrate in the community, to be called for when the addressee heard that there was a letter awaiting him.

Hence the habit grew of depositing at the wharf coffee-house letters also going by land to and from other parts of the country—these being carried by whatever means the landlord found available. It became customary to address one's correspondent at the leading tavern of the community. "Thus," says Parton, "several years before there was post-office or post rider in the colonies, a rude, slow, unsafe but neighborly system of letter delivery has sprung up." This method persisted irregularly long after the establishment of a post office. As late as 1744, when a government mail system had been in operation for many years, the editor of the *Weekly Post Boy* in New York made this formal announcement:

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WHEREAS, about a Fortnight ago three or four letters directed to the Printer of this paper were left at the Merchants' Coffee-House in this City, among many other letters, by Captain Romar from South Carolina, which letters have been by ill-minded persons either destroyed or conveyed away unknown. This is to notify, that if any Person will give sufficient information, whereby the Offender may have justice, he shall have twenty shillings reward. The Keeper of the said Coffee House late usage of me obliges me to have no more Sentiments of him that the Case will allow.

We dare not even guess at the meaning of the darkly ominous hint in the last sentence.

The first suggestion for the establishment of postal service in America originated in Massachusetts in 1638, when King Charles I was asked to grant a patent to some one who would set up an institution "so useful and absolutely necessary." A fee of twopence, "the least coin there," was proposed as the charge on a letter. This request was not acted upon until many years had passed.

The first legislative action was that of Massachusetts in 1639, providing for foreign mail:

For preventing the miscarriage of letters. . . . It is ordered that notice be given that Richard Fairbanks his house in Boston is the place appointed for all letters, which are brought from beyond the seas or are to be sent thither, are to bee brought to him and he is to take care that they bee delivered, or sent according to their directions; and he is allowed for every such letter 1d. and must answer all miscarriages through his owne neglect in this kind; provided, that no man shall bee compelled to bring his letters thither except hee please.

Some years later, in 1657 to 1660, the Dutch government at New Amsterdam passed postal regulations differing from those of Massachusetts in that they threatened fines for pri-

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vate carrying of letters across the ocean, and directed that all such mail must go through the office of the secretary of the province, in whose office a box was placed to receive it. The fee on each letter was "three stivers in wampum." The Virginia Assembly in 1661 decreed that "all letters superscribed for the service of his Majesty or publique" should be forwarded as rapidly as possible from one plantation to another by the owners thereof until they reached their destination—a fine of three hundred and fifty pounds of tobacco being assessed for any default.

New Amsterdam was captured by the English in 1664 and promptly metamorphosed into New York. In 1672 the governor of the province was Francis Lovelace, an energetic and public-spirited man, who, among other good works, established a Merchants' Exchange and also the first regular overland mail service. Annoyed by the difficulties which he and other colonial governors experienced in communicating with each other, he decided to set up a mail line to New England, and accordingly made proclamation that the first monthly messenger to Boston would leave New York on January 1, 1673. "Those that be disposed to send letters," he advertised, "to bring them to the Secretary's office, where in a locked box they shall be preserved till the messenger calls for them; all persons paying the post before the bagg be sealed up."

The governor wrote a letter, acquainting Governor Winthrop of Connecticut with his design and sent it by the first messenger:

I herewith present you with two rarities, a packquett of the latest inteligence I could meet withal, and a post. By the first you will see what has been acted on the stage of Europe; by the latter you will meet with a monthly fresh supply; so that if it receive but the same ardent inclinations as first it hath for myself, by our monthly advisos, all publique occurrence may

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be transmitted between us, together with severall conveniencys of publique importance, consonant to the demands laid upon us by his sacred majesty, who strictly enjoins all his American subjects to enter into a close correspondency with each other. This I look upon as the most compendious means to beget a mutual understanding. . . . This person that has undertaken the employment I conceived most proper, being voted active stout and indefatigable. He is sworn as to his fidelity. I have affixt an annual sallery, on him, which, together with the advantage of his letters and other small portable packages may afford him a handsome livelyhood. Hartford is the first stage I have designed him to change his horse, where constantly I expect he should have a fresh one lie. . . . Each first Monday of the month he sets out from New York and is to return within the month from Boston to us again. The maile has divers baggs, according to the towns the letters are designed to, which are sealed up till their arrival with the seal of the secretarie's office. Only by-letters are in an open bag, to dispense by the wayes. . . . I shall only beg of you your furtherance to so universall a good work; that is to afford him directions where and to whom to make his application upon his arrival at Boston; as likewise to afford him what letters you can to establish him in that employment there. It would be advantageous to our designe, if in the intervall you discoursed with some of the most able woodmen, to make out the best and most facile way for a post, which in process of tyme would be the King's best highway; as likewise passages and accommodations at rivers, fords and other necessary places.

Instead of starting on January 1st, the first courier was held by Lovelace in the hope that some later news would arrive from England, and did not set forth until January 22d. It was a momentous day when he rode northward through the wooded hills of Manhattan, paused amid great excitement at the tavern in Haerlem, then ferried across the Haerlem River and plunged into the wilderness beyond, to pick his way along dim trails—some of them of Indian origin—into the northeastern colonies. He carried several

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small leather "portmantles" full of letters and parcels. His instructions from Lovelace—who thought of him as a post-master—were, in part:

You are to comport yourself with all sobriety and civility to those that shall entrust you, and not exact on them for the prices of both Letter and Pacquetts. You are principally to apply your selfe to the Governors, especially Gov. Winthrop, from whom you shall receive the best Direction how to forme ye best Poast Road.

You are likewise to advise where the most commodious place will be to leave all the by-Letters out of your Road, which, when having it once well fixt, you are not only to leave the Letters there, but at your returne to call for answers, and leave a Publication of your Resolutions, the wch you must cause to be disperst to all parts. . . .

When you think it requisite, you are to marke some Trees that shall direct Passengers the best way, and to fixe certaine Houses for your Several Stages both to bait and lodge at.

When any persons are desirous to travaile with you, you are to treat them civilly, and to afford them your best help and assistance, that I may heare no complaint to you.

You shall doe well to provide yor selfe of a Spare Horse, good Port Mantels, that soe neither Letters nor Pacquetts receive any Damage under yor hands.

There are some other considerations wch I shall forbear to mention till yor return and I receive a further accompt of you, and soe God bless all yor honest undertakings.

FFRAN LOVELACE.

FFORT JAMES ye 22d of Jany 1672.

You are also to detect and cause to bee apprehended all Souldyers and Servants runn away from these parts.

Truly a varied occupation was the postrider's in those days! It might be added that he was under oath

that you will truly and faithfully discharge the trust imposed in you as a Post Master, and that you will neither directly nor

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indirectly detain, conceale or open any Letters, Packetts or other Goods committed to your charge,

but would carefully deliver the same, travel as rapidly as possible,

and in all things truly and soberly comport yor selfe, so as belongs to the trust imposed in you, and as a Post Master ought to doe.

Soe help you God.

New England at this time had less than one hundred thousand inhabitants, New York thirty-five hundred.

This move by Lovelace stimulated official interest in postal service. In 1673 Massachusetts passed an act which, reciting that "the occasions of the country doe frequently require that messengers be sent post," for the first time fixed a fee for postriders: threepence per mile, to be paid from the public treasury, "as full satisfaction for the expense of horse and man." Innkeepers were forbidden to charge the post more than twopence per bushel for oats and fourpence for hay, "day and night." In 1674 Connecticut passed a similar act, but limited the tavern charges for a slightly different reason:

Being sensible of the great damage that may accrue to the publique by a liberty or boldness which some persons may take to themselves (when imployed by order of authority for the conveyance of letters, post and other important occasions of the colony) by profuse and extravagant spending at the ordinaries and other places upon the countrey's accot.

A long list of prices was stipulated by this law. The allowance for horse feed from October to April was to be larger "for every night they lye out." Riders paid no fees at the ferries, the "ferridge" being charged to the colony.

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These two colonial laws, however, referred only to official letters, not to those of the public.

Lovelace's post was short-lived. Less than seven months after it was begun the Dutch recaptured New York. The city was returned to the English, it is true, in the following year, but Lovelace was no longer governor, Edmund Andros being appointed in his stead, and Andros was not as keenly interested in a public mail route as his predecessor had been. King Philip's Indian war now came on, too, to make traveling in New England unsafe. More than one postrider fell a victim to savage arrows in the early days of the colonies.

Curiously enough, some of the favorite private messengers of the period were friendly Indians or Indian servants. They were intelligent, faithful, speedy, had great endurance, knew the country better than others and had the knack of getting through and "delivering the goods." Roger Williams, writing to John Winthrop, speaks of word "by this bearer Wequash whome (being a Pequot himselfe) I commend for a guide in the Pequot expedition." Again, "I pray let your servant direct the Native with this letter." John Endicott writes to John Winthrop in 1638, "Your kinde lines I received by Mascanomet"; and again in 1650, "I resavid yours by the Indian." Indians were still carrying letters in New York colony long after a regular mail service was set up.

The merchants of Boston, missing Lovelace's post, prayed the General Court to "depute some mete person to take in and convey letters"; and in response to this, John Hayward, "the Scrivener," was appointed in 1677, receiving a sort of monopoly as far as Boston was concerned, and employing such riders as he found necessary, though of course his system was not extensive. He was the first to be called Postmaster in Boston, and the first place generally known as the post office was the little room, less than five by ten feet in size, where he located his business in 1686.

The first mail service in Pennsylvania was ordered by

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William Penn in 1683, when he granted to Henry Waldy, "of Tekonay," the right to carry letters and "to supply passengers with horses to New Castle or to the Falls" (of the Delaware). The post went once a week, and the time of departure was to be published "on the meetinghouse doore" and in other conspicuous places. A letter scale was fixed: from Philadelphia to Chester, twopence; to New Castle, Delaware, fourpence; to Maryland, sixpence, etc. Official dispatches in Pennsylvania were passed along by justices of the peace, sheriffs and constables, from one to another, a twenty-shilling fine being prescribed by law for every hour's delay. They were permitted to impress horses and men for this duty, twopence a mile as pay being allowed for the services of either man or horse.

In 1684 Governor Dongan of New York proposed to the British government a chain of posthouses extending from Nova Scotia to the Carolinas; but there was not enough business to support such a system, and nothing came of the suggestion save the reestablishment of a line (though irregular and unsatisfactory) from New York to Boston. Then in 1692 came a new era in the colonial posts, when a patent was granted by William and Mary to Thomas Neale, a court favorite, to set up and operate a mail service in America for the period of twenty-one years. He was given power to found offices in each of the colonies, and had a monopoly of the carriage of letters for profit; but merchants and others were not forbidden to send letters by servants or private hands, supposedly free. The evasion of postal charges which this permitted was a detriment to the public system for many years.

For his patent Neale paid the royal treasury only six shillings a year. He never came to America in person, but appointed as his deputy Andrew Hamilton, a Scotchman and former merchant in Edinburgh, who had been in the Jerseys for several years and served as governor of the province.

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His postal territory was a difficult one. The English settlements were a veritable shoestring in shape, ten times as long as wide, straggling along the coast from central Maine to Georgia, a thousand miles as the crow flies and much farther as the horseman rode, and with their farthest inland outposts seldom as much as one hundred and fifty miles from the ocean.

Hamilton's first move was to induce the various colonial assemblies to pass laws fixing uniform rates for intercolonial service. New York did so at once, and provided for a general letter office in New York City. An interesting feature of the New York rates was that a letter going to the West Indies, Europe or some other place beyond the seas cost no more than a letter directed to Maryland—ninepence; while to Virginia the charge was twelpence! For some occult reason it was provided that no letters going to or from Long Island or up and down the Hudson River should be sent through the post office. As this represented the bulk of New York City's mail, the Legislature must have had its collective tongue in its cheek when it framed the act.

The law of Massachusetts in support of Neale's patent is interesting because it specified that each letter must be marked with a print showing the date on which it was received at the office. This was the first provision in America for postmarks, and came just twelve years after Dockwra had originated them in London, in 1681. The more southerly colonies were too sparsely settled at this time to make post lines successful, and they did little to aid the project.

In four years Hamilton had only succeeded in setting up a line from the mouth of the Piscataqua (Portsmouth, N. H.) to Philadelphia and New Castle, Delaware. The posts were nowhere profitable. The total receipts of the New York office in 1693 were sixty-one pounds; while the postmaster had twenty pounds in salary and was allowed ninety pounds for carrying the mail halfway to Boston (the



From United States Post Office Department

THE R. F. D. WAGON IN WINTER



From United States Post Office Department

THE STAR ROUTE IN THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS

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riders met and exchanged mails alternately at Hartford and Saybrook) and sixty pounds for carrying it to Philadelphia. The postmaster at Philadelphia drew ten pounds a year salary. The receipts increased rapidly in the larger cities, but they never quite caught up with the expenses; and the colonial assemblies were frequently urged to do something to aid the posts.

As in Europe, the post office gave birth to the first newspapers. When the General Court of Massachusetts thought it desirable to enlighten the people on public affairs, they caused a broadside to be published, which was headed, "This is Published to Prevent False Reports." It consisted of extracts from letters of the colony's agent in London and of the *London Publick News-Letter*, together with the latest royal orders. In 1690, Benjamin Harris, of Boston, published the first real newspaper in what is now the United States. It was called *Publick Occurrences, both Foreign and Domestick* and was unlicensed, which caused it to be quickly suppressed.

Postmaster John Campbell began a regular business of supplying hand-written news letters to the New England governors and other patrons; though his father, Duncan Campbell, had done this at irregular intervals. There is in existence one of these letters, apparently issued by Duncan Campbell, which consists almost entirely of a letter just received by him from New York. It begins thus:

NEW YORKE April 29th 1700

I am thankfull for yours of the 22^d instant and what News is here is Contained in the following acc^{ott}

From Philadelf. we have advice that 2 ships From London and one From Bristoll, are arrived there but bring no News. . . .

And so on through a page or two of gossip, which, if it was not highly important, at least seemed to give assurance

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that nothing of a serious nature had occurred anywhere. The New York letter having ended, the postmaster appended this note:

Boston May y^e 6 1700

The Above is A Copy of A News Letter I had by y^e Last Post No News offers hear, Cap^t Rugells from Meves arived hear yesterday.

John Campbell was granted permission in 1704 to publish a newspaper, and his *News-Letter* thereafter appeared in printed form, and with more and more news as time went on. In this little sheet the postmaster now and then reassures the public by giving a detailed account of how the foreign mail was put on board the several vessels which carried it. From time to time he also makes clear the local procedure:

This is to give Notice, that when the Street Door is shut and no Light Candle and Lanthorn is seen hanging up in the Postoffice Entry at Boston on the Post nights coming in: Then all persons concerned may be assured without knocking or inquiring that there is no Post yet come in; and before Candle lighting if no Post be come in; The same is to be seen on a little Board hanging out at the Post-Office Window.

And again:

The Post Master of Boston does send out every Two days after that the Post comes in, and after the Receipt of Foreign Letters by Sea: All such Letters and Packetts that remain in the Office uncall'd for; And if the Persons they are directed to cannot be found or that the said Letters or Pacquetts are for any Persons in the Neighboring Towns out of the Post Road; Then the names of the said Persons are every day to be seen on a fair Alphabetical List for the Sirname, with the name of the Town: If they are for the Town of Boston, then no Town added.

Early Colonial Posts in America

The postmaster sold English newspapers as well as his own: "The Monthly Mercuries at 12 Pence a piece, London-Gazettes, Flying Posts, Post-man, Post-Boy and Observators, at Two pence a piece." The word "Post" attached itself to newspapers in America as well as in England, and is a favorite name to this day. We evolved new uses for the word, too. When a man is well-informed, we say he is "posted." The old news sheets used sometimes to be affixed to the walls for public reading, whence we gradually developed a new noun, "poster," and likewise the practice of "posting" a club member for failure to pay his dues.

The postmaster of those days, being a fountainhead of news, became a sort of general agent and commission man, and must have picked up a goodish bit of money in fees for his various services. Such notices as these are numerous:

A Negro Woman to be Sold by John Campbell, Post-Master and to be seen at his House next door to the Anchor-Tavern in Boston.

A Certaine Person wants a single able man to Drive a Teame in Boston: If any such will repair to John Campbell, Post-Master of Boston, they may have Encouragement for that work.

"Any Person that has a Boy or Boys that can Read and Write, who wants to be put out to a good Master" was also advised to speak (or send notice) to the postmaster, "where they may know further." "A Tanyard to be let on reasonable Terms" and a still for sale and with it a negro "who understands Stilling" were other items on Mr. Campbell's list. Lost and found articles were reported to him, and any news of runaway negroes or strayed cattle or horses was to be given to him or to the postrider.

One of Campbell's paragraphs notifies "any Person or Persons who design any letters for England via Piscataqua [or Portsmouth, then a prominent seaport for England] to go

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either by her Majesties Ship the Dover, The Mast Ships or any other Vessels" to "bring them to the Post-Office in Boston and paying the Postage, shall be carefully put on board." The only sailings which could then be relied upon with any certainty were those of the mast fleet of Maine and the tobacco fleet from Virginia. New York was such an unimportant port that letters from there to England usually went via Boston, Philadelphia or Virginia. Lord Cornbury wrote from the future metropolis to the Lords of Trade in 1702, "But I entreat your Lords to consider that but few ships goe directly from this port to England, So that I must depend upon the Boston and Philadelphia posts for conveying my letters . . . and sometimes both these Conveyances faile."

In 1704 Cornbury again begs their Lordships "to consider the difficulty I lye under," in that

the Post that goes through this Place goes eastward as far as Boston, but westward he goes no further than Philadelphia, and there is no other post upon all this Continent, so that if I have any letters to send to Virginia or Maryland, I must either send an Express who is often retarded for want of boats to cross those great rivers they must go over . . . or else for want of horses, or else I must send them by some passengers who are going thither. . . . The least I have known any Express take to go from hence to Virginia has been three weeks, so that very often before I can hear from Coll. Nicholson what time the fleet will sail and send my packets the fleet is sailed.

Even after a ship had sailed, there were disappointments, as witness the following from the *Boston News-Letter*:

These are to give Notice, That the Bag of Letters designed for England, by the Briganteen Experiment, Jonathan Evans, Master, that was stranded at Hampton, are now in the Post-Office at Boston; And any Person that wants their Letters again may have them.

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One of the complaints made by post officials was that riders were often delayed by being compelled to wait for travelers who wished to accompany them for safety. On the other hand, that travelers sometimes had to wait for the post is proven by the diary of Mrs. Sarah Knight, that daring woman who made a journey from Boston to New York in 1704. Her experience also gives a hint of the trials and dangers of the roads, even those traversed by the post-riders between the larger towns, two hundred years ago.

Mrs. Knight at first intended riding only from Boston to New Haven, "being about two Hundred Mile," as she estimates. A kinsman accompanied her to Dedham, where she was to meet "y^e Western post." She tarried there until evening, but he did not come along, so next day—after some trouble in procuring a guide—she rode twelve miles farther, "to Billingses, where he used to lodg." At length the rider appeared, and starting early one morning, they came in the afternoon, after sundry adventures, "to a River w^{ch} they Generally Ride thro', But I dare not venture; so the Post got a Ladd and Cannoo to carry me to tother side, and he rid thro' and Led my hors." The canoe was very cranky, and the passenger was vastly alarmed, but they got safely over; and then the genial post cheered her by telling her that "we had neer 14 miles to Ride to the next Stage (where we were to Lodg)" and that "there was a bad River we were to Ride thro,' w^{ch} was so very firce a hors could sometimes hardly stem it: But it was but narrow, and wee should soon be over."

Night had fallen before they reached this river, and the lady's heart almost ceased beating as they went pitching down a steep incline in Stygian darkness to the dangerous stream. She could tell only "by the Going of the Hors wee had entred the water." To give her courage as they stumbled through the torrent, the postman rode close beside her, and presently they emerged safe on the other side. Thence on up steep

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hill and down, stumbling over rocks and ruts, sometimes threshed in the face by low-hanging "Branches and bow's" which were invisible in the darkness, she finally heard "the Post's sounding his horn, which assured mee hee was arrived at the Stage where we were to Lodg."

Her descriptions of the miserable accommodations given them at the country stopping places still further enliven an already vivacious narrative. At four o'clock next morning they set out again "with a french Docter in our company. Hee and y^e Post put on very furiously, so that I could not keep up with them, only as now and then they'd stop till they see mee."

She noted that "the Rodes all along this way are very bad, Incumbred wth Rocks and mountainos passages." Even seventy years later there could have been little improvement, for Hugh Finley, postal inspector, declared in 1773 that the road east of New London was bad "past all conception." But if roads were bad in summer and autumn when he traversed them, what must they have been in winter and spring! There are notices of mails two weeks behind time, "by reason of the great snows." In February, 1705, says the *News-Letter*,

The Eastern Post came in on Saturday and sets out Monday night, who says, There is no Travailing with Horses, especially beyond *Newbury* but with Snow Shoes, which our People do much use now that never did before. The Western Post came then also in, and sets out on Tuesday Morning who likewise says, 'Tis very bad Travailing.

From New Haven Mrs. Knight, having had a taste of adventure, and probably liking it, in spite of the vicissitudes, decided to go on to New York to attend to a bit of business. She then journeyed back to Boston, where "Kind relations and friends flocked in to welcome mee and hear the story of my transactions and travails, I having this day bin five

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months from home and now I cannot fully express my Joy and Satisfaction. But desire sincearly to adore my Great Benefactor for his graciously carrying forth and returning in safety his unworthy handmaid."

This illustrates the not unjustifiable dread of travel common to that period, not only in America but in Europe. And not only in 1704 but throughout the greater part of the eighteenth century, an American about to take a journey—let us say, from Virginia to New York—would be apt to sit down with his attorney before starting and draw up a document beginning, "Whereas, I am about to take a journey to New York, and whereas, it is uncertain whether or not I may live to return, I do therefore think it meet to make this, my last will and testament." He then consulted the almanac to ascertain the most auspicious phases of the moon and the zodiacal signs for traveling, and was apt to give a supper either at his home or at the tavern to bid his friends farewell. Probably he had never heard the old Japanese proverb, "Let that day on which a man leaves home be accounted the day of his death," but he would not have regarded it as an overmorbidity sentiment.

Miss Woolley calls attention to the fact that it was about 1700 that letters ceased mentioning the name of the bearer, and began to speak of their going by the post: "The Post is just blowing his horn and cannot help it that I write no more particularly." "I had not time to say more by the last post than I did." Nevertheless, the private carriage of letters continued in considerable volume, the principal reason being that the government rates were so high. Logan writes to Penn in 1708 by a private hand for the sake of economy. "I write thus," says he, "to save postage, which is now very high to Boston." It then cost twelvecence, or nearly a quarter in present-day money, to carry a letter from Boston to New York, and fifteenpence, or about thirty cents, from Boston to Philadelphia. Hamilton in 1698 had proposed

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that the rates be raised; but they were high enough already, in all conscience, and the British Postmasters-General told him that in their opinion business would be bettered rather by lowering the rates than by raising them. One difficulty was that the colonies had not yet passed uniform laws, and another was that such laws as they had were not well enforced. Nothing definite was done to correct the situation, however, and in 1699 Neale, the patentee, died, heavily in debt, leaving the American postal concession to two of his creditors, Hamilton and one West, an Englishman. In 1707 the British government bought the Hamilton-West rights, paying £1,664 for them; and thus the American mails passed directly under the royal post office. The connection of the Hamilton family with the business did not cease, for John Hamilton, Andrew's son, was appointed Postmaster-General for America, and held the position until 1730.

CHAPTER XV

COLONIAL POSTS TO THE TIME OF THE REVOLUTION

Many a lazy, longing look is cast
To watch the weary postboy traveling through,
On horse's rump his budget buckled fast,
With letters, safe in leathern prison pent,
And wet from press, full many a packet sent.

PHILIP FRENEAU

WHEN the British Post Office took over the American mail service the total population of the colonies was probably not over two hundred and seventy-five thousand, of which there were about one hundred thousand in New England and twenty thousand in New York. Pennsylvania, the Jerseys and Delaware may have had thirty-five thousand, and the whole of Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas did not total much more than one hundred and twenty thousand. In the middle and southern colonies only a few traders and daring woodsmen had ventured beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Roads were few and often merely openings through the forest, which became impassable in bad weather.

Mail was first officially carried as far as Falmouth (afterwards Portland) Maine, in 1711, but no post office was established there until more than fifty years later. A weekly line of posts had begun to run from Portsmouth, through Boston, Rhode Island and Connecticut to New York, and thence to Philadelphia, but there was nothing of a regular nature south of that. A letter consumed six weeks and sometimes more in traveling between Virginia and New York. The New York-Boston riders alternated their route,

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now meeting and exchanging mails at Hartford, now at Saybrook. As an instance of the leisureliness of the system, the eastbound mail left Philadelphia early each Friday morning, going via Burlington, New Jersey, and Perth Amboy, and reached New York on Saturday night, where all the New England letters lay until the rider started towards Boston on the following Monday morning.

A great burden on the colonial postal service was the free transmission of public and official letters. This, combined with the high rates and the scanty, widely distributed population, for years prevented any possibility of the system's paying its own way. A general post-office act for all the British dominions was passed by Parliament in 1711, but it did the service in America little good. Rates in general were by this act fixed upon a basis of fourpence for any distance up to sixty miles, and sixpence between sixty and one hundred miles. In an endeavor to correct the ship-mail situation, it was provided that captains, on penalty of a fine, must deliver their letters to the postmasters at the port towns, where they would receive a fee of a penny a letter. Certain letters were exempted from being sent by mail if the senders desired to send them otherwise. These were

such letters as shall respectively concern goods sent by common known carriers of goods by carts, waggons or pack-horses, and shall be delivered with the goods which such letters do concern, without hire or reward or other profit or advantage for receiving or delivering such letters—

also letters carried by ship captains and referring to goods sent in the same vessel. This provision was utilized in carrying out a widespread evasion of the law. Every letter carried by ship captain, coachman, carrier, peddler or even government postman for his own profit was claimed to be a letter referring to some package of merchandise accompanying it, and therefore not subject to government postage.

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The most remarkable reaction to this law took place in Virginia. Alexander Spotswood, a shrewd, vigorous, public-spirited man, was governor there when the first regular post line was opened in 1717. In a letter to the Lords of Trade a few weeks later, he said:

Some time last Fall the Post M^r Gen^ll of America, having thought himself Obliged to endeavor the Settling a post through Virginia and Maryland in y^e same manner as they are settled in the other Northern Plantations . . . gave out Commissions for that purpose, and a post was accordingly established once a fortnight from W^{ms}burg to Philadelphia, and for the Conveyance of Letters bro^t hither by Sea, through the several Countys. In order to this, the Post M^r Set up printed Placards (such as were sent in by the Post M^r Gen^ll of Great Britain) at all the Posts, requiring the delivery of all Letters not excepted by the Act of Parliament to be delivered to his Deputys there. No sooner was this noised about but a great Clamour was raised against it. The people were made to believe that the Parl^t could not Levy any Tax (for so they call y^e Rates of Postage) here without the Consent of the Generall Assembly. That, besides, all their Letters were exempted, because scarce any came in here but what some way or other concern^d Trade; That tho' M^{rs} should, for the reward of a penny a Letter, deliver them, the Post M^r could Demand no Postage for the Conveyance of them, and abundance more to the same purpose, as ridiculous as Arrogant.

A bill was promptly put through the House of Burgesses which practically nullified the post-office act by threatening fines to the postmasters who carried out its provisions. This remarkable protest by Virginia against what was regarded as taxation without representation is the first sign of that temper which did not develop elsewhere in the colonies for nearly fifty years; and indeed, it was far in advance of any other action of the sort in Virginia. It is not surprising that the Old Dominion did not get a weekly mail from the north until ten or twelve years later. South of there, the

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wild and turbulent districts in North Carolina kept South Carolina much isolated from the other colonies, and her infrequent mail connection with the northward was mostly by coasting vessels.

In 1730 John Hamilton died and ex-Governor Spotswood was made Postmaster-General of America. He contracted to handle the business for a salary of three hundred pounds a year, plus ten per cent of the net profits of the system, which latter provision indicated an amazing optimism, for the posts were as yet far from self-supporting. Some of the colonial governments had been assisting it, doubtless to the best of their little abilities, though the amounts they granted seem almost comic: New York fifty pounds a year, for example, and New Hampshire twenty pounds. The "coffee-house delivery," despite the law, was still the most popular service in the cities, especially the ports—and, by the way, there were few towns of any size save on tidewater. But this method was subject to abuse and accidents, as frequent advertisements like this attest:

Those who took a Letter up yesterday directed to Bartholomew Barwell, and brought by the Snow Irene, Capt. Jacobson, from London, are desired to inform the Owner where it is that he may obtain it.

Posting and receiving a letter was a cumbrous business then. Most offices would not agree to send a letter by a certain post unless it was brought in at least an hour before the time of departure. At Boston and at most other cities, "From twelve to two o'clock, being dinner hour, no office is kept." It was customary to pay the postage on receipt of the letter—theoretically, that is; for addressees known to the postmaster usually said, "Charge it," just as they did to the grocer and shoemaker; and every postmaster had his worries over his postage due account. Campbell, at Boston, advertises in his *News-Letter* for January 4, 1713, that

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December 14th was the day for settling postage accounts, and those who had not paid must do so by January 5th, if they wished further credit. The postmaster at Perth Amboy was long-suffering, but he finally became emphatic in a newspaper advertisement in October, 1735:

This is to give Notice that all persons in Town and Country that are indebted to Andrew Hay, Postmaster at Perth Amboy, for the postage of letters to Pay the same or they may expect Touble [*sic*]; some having been due near four years.

signed, AND. HAY

It seems almost incredible that mail should have been carried on foot through the sparsely settled country of that day; but we find in 1730 an advertisement in New York giving notice that "Whoever inclines to perform the foot-post to Albany this winter is to make application to Richard Nichols, the postmaster." There were few post offices then, and this footman, like the riding postmen, delivered many letters directly to addressees along the route; and numerous were the complaints, by the way, that these fellows padded the postal charges which they collected on letters.

The postriders did all sorts of errands for their clients along the road; in fact, in earlier days, this was regarded as their perquisite, their small salaries as postmen being decidedly insufficient as a means of livelihood. Numerous letters of the time show that the rider constituted himself a private parcels postman: "I received the package of books by the post"; "If Sudance can bundle up John's freise Jacket and Mingoe's cloth Jacket in an old towell pray let the post bring them." Even a team of horses: "If their legs are fit to bring them, I desire they may be sent by the post, unless some safer opportunity present in two or three days." * As late as 1773 Finlay heard of a postman delivering a yoke of oxen in Connecticut. Fancy the speed that the mail must

* Mary E. Woolley,

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have achieved when accompanying two animals surpassed in slowness of gait only by the tortoise! As population increased and faster and better service was required, these side lines of the postriders came to be a great nuisance, and the authorities had much ado to break up the practice.

Even up to the time of the Revolution, some of the commonest items in the newspapers were those which told whether or not the posts had arrived—and almost invariably at least one of them was a day or more behind time. “The Western Post is not yet arrived”; “The New York Post is three days due”—these were common announcements. In 1704, “in the pleasant month of May,” a New York editor reports that “the last Storm put our Pennsylvania Post a week behind, and he is not yet com’d in.” In 1785 the mails from Boston to Maine were delayed no less than five weeks by winter weather and bad roads. Postmaster Colden of New York advertises in February 1757:

Whereas the late Severity of the Weather has occasioned an Irregularity of the Stage between this place and Philadelphia; PUBLICK NOTICE is hereby given, That an especial Messenger with the Mail for Philadelphia will be despatched from this Office at Ten of the Clock this Forenoon in order to bring the Stage right again.

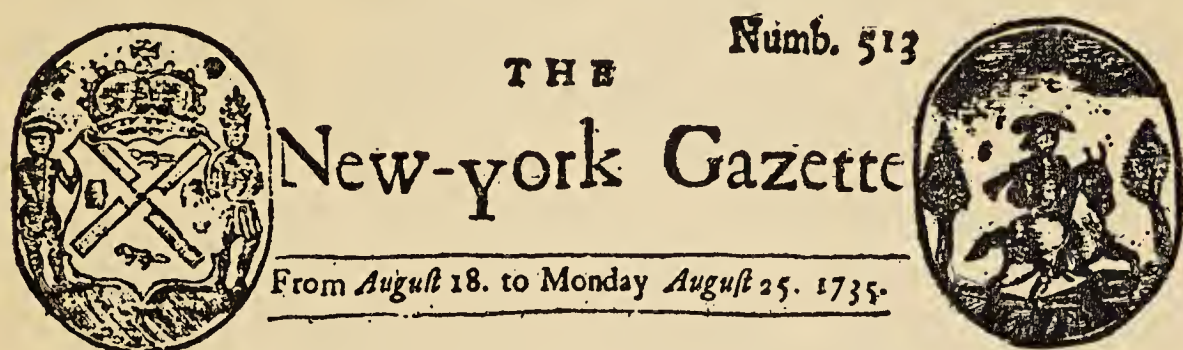
ALEXANDER COLDEN, Post Master

In 1717, it is said that a letter would go from Boston to Williamsburg, Virginia, in four weeks, save in the winter months, when double that time was required. In the latter thirties this line is mentioned as continuing to Newport, on the James River, making a round trip from Philadelphia in twenty-four days. In 1727, William Bradford, postmaster at Philadelphia, promoted a line to Annapolis and New Castle, Delaware, to go down one shore of Chesapeake Bay and come back by the other. The mail between New York and Philadelphia and New York and Boston was then being

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carried once a week save in December, January and February, when it went only once a fortnight. The riders have been much criticized, and it must be admitted that some of them shirked, but they were confronted by many hardships, especially on the far northern and southern routes, where they frequently lay out in the open at night, with the letter bag for a pillow, and the horse tethered to a picket pin. During the French and Indian War, from about 1755 to 1759 inclusive, the riders in New England, New York and Pennsylvania were often in danger of or actual sufferers from hostile attack.

Even as late as 1745 it was thought advisable to mark the



HEADING OF "THE NEW YORK GAZETTE," 1735

Note the postrider at the right

road between Philadelphia and New York with posts at two-mile intervals for the guidance of travelers. There was no public money for the purpose, so by private subscription sufficient funds were raised to do the work between Trenton and Amboy. John Dalley, surveyor, presently reports that this has been done, and adds that he hopes to complete the job to Philadelphia if the money can be made up.

It was then the almost universal custom for postmasters to publish newspapers, sometimes the only one in the town. Newspapers multiplied through this practice, for when a postmaster left office, he frequently refused to turn his paper over to his successor, but continued its publication, while the successor started a new one. The *Boston Gazette*

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and *Boston Post-Boy* were founded thus by new postmasters, following Campbell and his *News-Letter*.

Gossip and private letters were the editor's only sources of news, and his paper was usually very small, poorly printed and dull. Its first page or so set forth the political and war news of Europe as brought by the latest vessels, perhaps a proclamation by the king, a scrap or two from some other paper, selections from private letters locally received, and appeals to subscribers to pay up. By the time you reached the last column of the third page—if there were so many—the advertising had begun, and it continued (its volume increasing as the years passed) through the fourth and last page. If ships or postriders were delayed, the news space had to be filled with poetry and miscellany. The editor had no correspondents, no means of obtaining news from a distance; but it was considered a sort of public duty on the part of every citizen who received a letter from some other part of the country or world to share it with his neighbors through the press. Newspapers were sprinkled thickly with paragraphs headed, "Extract of a letter from a young Gentleman belonging to this Town on board the Delawar East Indiaman"; "A Coppy of a letter from a Gentleman at the Falls of the Ohio to his Friend in Newcastle"; or "A Paragraph of a Letter from a Merchant of Note in Charles-town, in South Carolina, to One in this Town."

One of the most noteworthy of Postmaster-General Spotswood's official acts was his appointment of Benjamin Franklin to be postmaster at Philadelphia in 1737, displacing William Bradford, whose administration had not been satisfactory. Soon thereafter Franklin was also made comptroller, and in that position had a sort of supervision over several offices.

Stepping into Bradford's involuntarily vacated shoes must have given Franklin no little pleasure; for Bradford, while postmaster, had been a great annoyance to him. Franklin

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was editor and publisher of a newspaper long before he became postmaster, and Bradford nonchalantly forbade the postriders who left Philadelphia to carry any newspaper save his own, the *Mercury*. He did not fail to let the public know that through this advantage, his paper had facilities for gathering news and for distribution which Franklin's *Gazette* did not enjoy.

It must be remembered that newspapers were not yet admitted to the mails; the private carrying of them was one of the postrider's perquisites. It is a matter of record, however, that Franklin succeeded in having many of his *Gazettes* carried—by bribing the riders! Bradford's conduct greatly disgusted him. "I thought so meanly of the practice," he says, "that when I afterwards came into his situation, I took care never to imitate it." Nevertheless, when he became postmaster, the handling of Bradford's *Mercury* was promptly forbidden to the postriders. When Franklin was blamed for this he showed proof that he had no choice in the matter, but had been directed by Spotswood to issue the order because of Bradford's failure as postmaster to render a proper accounting. As a matter of fact, Franklin directed the riders to take all the newspapers offered them, instead of carrying only those issued by a postmaster. Franklin found, however, that the postmaster-publisher had a distinct advantage; "for though the salary was small, it [the office] facilitated the correspondence that improved my newspaper, increased the number demanded, as well as the advertisements to be inserted, so that it came to afford me a considerable income."

In 1753 Elliot Benger, who had been Postmaster-General since 1743, died, and Franklin was appointed in his stead. Franklin remarked in later life that he had never sought office for himself, and several of his biographers have corroborated his statement. The doctor had evidently forgotten the letter which he wrote to an influential friend in London

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in 1751 when Benger was reported to be suffering from a fatal illness:

The occasion of my writing this *via* Ireland is that I have just received Advice that the Deputy Post Master General of America (Mr. Elliot Benger residing in Virginia) who has for some time been in declining Way is tho't to be near his end. My Friends advise me to apply for this Post and Mr. Allen (our Chief Justice) has wrote the enclos'd to his Correspondent, Mr. Simpson, in my favour requesting his Interest and Application in the Affair and empowering him to advance a considerable Sum if necessary.

. . . Mr. Allen has desired Mr. Simpson to confer with you on the Affair and if you can without much Inconvenience to yourself advise and assist in endeavoring to secure the Success of this application you will whatever may be the event add greatly to the Obligations you have already conferred on me; and if it succeeds I hope that as my Power of doing good increases my Inclination may at least keep pace with it. . . . The Place has commonly been reputed to be worth about £150 a Year, but would otherwise be very suitable to me, particularly as it would enable me to execute a Scheme long since form'd of which I send you enclosed a Copy. . . . I would only add that as I have a Respect for Mr. Benger I should be glad the Application were so managed as not to give him any offence if he should recover. . . .

Your affectionate humble Serv't.

B. FRANKLIN

It so happened that Mr. Benger did not die that year, as expected, and not until 1753 did Franklin come into the hoped-for position. Even then he had to share the office, for the home government, following the system then prevalent in England, appointed joint Postmasters-General for the colonies, Franklin's colleague being William Hunter of Virginia. In 1761 Hunter died and was succeeded by William Foxcroft of New York, who served until the breaking out of the Revolution.

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The Postmasters-General had need to bestir themselves if they were ever to realize the three hundred pounds a year which their contract allowed to each of them from the net profits of the system; for the service was poor and there was much competition—some of it fair, some illegal. Mail between Boston and New York and New York and Philadelphia was carried no oftener and but little faster than it had been fifty years before. Hartford was now off the route of the Boston-New York mail, and the people of that city and Middletown employed a private rider to go down and meet the regular post at Saybrook. There was not a post office between New York and New London; but about 1754-1755 one was opened at New Haven with James Parker, a local publisher, as postmaster. Parker hired a rider to carry his papers up the Connecticut Valley as far as Hartford, but found this did not pay, and asked permission for the man to pick up a few extra pence by carrying letters also.

There were not a few postmen like the one from Boston to Portsmouth of whom it was said that he seldom had in his bag more than four or five letters that had come through the post office, but "a tableful" which he was handling privately. Riders and postmasters often charged exorbitant postage rates, whether from ignorance or cupidity it is not always possible to determine. There were some charges, however, which make one's flesh creep. In 1766 a man at Falmouth, Maine, paid eight pounds postage on three single letters to Boston—two pounds, thirteen shillings, fourpence each! Another charge was found at the same office of two pounds, sixteen shillings—about fourteen dollars!—on a one-sheet letter.

Independent riders flourished, and it is difficult to decide from announcements in the papers who was working for the government and who was not. In 1752 we read in the New York papers that William Wood was the carrier between New York and Albany; and he solicited letters to be handed

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in, not at the post office, but "at his house on Thurman Dock on the North River or at Benjamin Pain's," who was then keeping the Gentleman's Coffee House near the Old Slip. Another notice announces that "the Albany Post arrived last night and proposes to set out again from hence on Wednesday next. Persons are desired to send their letters to Sergeant Younge at the Hartfordshire and Yorkshire, near the Fort." This tavern near military headquarters was selected for the Albany post because that rider brought important news from the theater of war up Canada way.

An announcement by Silent Wilde, News Carrier to Northampton, Deerfield, Etc., in 1775, proves that as newspapers became more important, riders appeared who delivered them through the country, incidentally handling a few letters on the side. A public messenger thus advertises in a Philadelphia paper in 1760:

Notice is hereby given that I, John Cisty, being employed by a number of gentlemen, intend to ride as a Messenger between Baltimore town in Maryland and Philadelphia, once a Fortnight during the Winter and once a Week in Summer. Any Gentleman having letters to send, then by leaving them at the London Coffee House, may depend they shall be called for by the humble servant.

JOHN CISTY

Franklin himself used other messengers than the post upon occasion. Illustrating the "dilatoriness" of Lord Loudoun, the commander-in-chief at New York in 1757, he tells of meeting in Loudoun's antechamber one day a Philadelphia messenger named Innis who had come with a packet from Governor Denny for Loudoun and who also brought some letters to Franklin from his friends. The doctor asked Innis when he intended returning to Philadelphia, and the man replied that he had been ordered to call next day for the general's reply to Denny's letter. Franklin hastened to

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his lodgings, wrote several letters and put them into Innis's hands the same day. Two weeks later he ran across Innis in the same place. "Returned so soon, Innis?" he remarked. "Returned!" exclaimed Innis. "No, I am not gone yet." "How so?" "Why, I have called here this and every morning these two weeks for his lordship's letters, and they are not ready yet."

As soon as he was appointed Postmaster-General Franklin made his son William comptroller and also made him postmaster of Philadelphia, later passing the latter position on to a kinsman of his wife and then to one of his own brothers. In the summer of 1753 he set out on an inspection tour and visited every post office in the country save that at Charleston. He caused new and shorter routes to be laid out and demanded greater speed. He had milestones set up on the main roads, as, for instance, all the way from Boston to Philadelphia. Instead of the weekly post between New York and Philadelphia, he sent three riders a week and changed the route. They had formerly had five great ferries to negotiate: across the Delaware from Bristol to Burlington, across the Raritan estuary at Perth Amboy, thence from Amboy to Staten Island, from Staten Island to Long Island, and finally from Brooklyn to Manhattan; and the ferrymen were inclined to delay the post until they had paying passengers to go with them. Franklin set a new route via Trenton and New Brunswick, where the Delaware and Raritan rivers were smaller, and from Elizabeth Port sent them to New York by sailboat, where the only detriment was that if the wind happened to be contrary, the mail might be held up for two or three days. It is gratefully recorded by a contemporary writer that between Philadelphia and Boston "answers to letters may now be obtained in three weeks which used to require six weeks."

Those were momentous years for the American posts. In 1755 a packet service was established between Falmouth,

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England, and New York. The Lords of Trade had previously had great difficulty in communicating with the colonial governors, and to insure delivery had made a practice of sending from three to five copies of each of their letters by different vessels. Even then it sometimes happened that all the letters were lost. In 1768 a second line of packet ships was started from England to Charleston, and these continued until the end of the Revolution.

One of Franklin's wisest moves was that of admitting newspapers to the mails, and thus cutting off a private traffic of the postriders which was subject to many abuses. The fee for sending a newspaper regularly by mail was set at ninepence a year for distances less than fifty miles, or one shilling sixpence up to one hundred miles, and greater distances in proportion.

An interesting sidelight on the manner in which mail lines were sometimes promoted by other agencies than the royal post office is found in letters passing between Franklin and George Washington in 1756. As an aid to the unfortunate Braddock expedition of 1755, Pennsylvania had established a line of riders from Philadelphia to Winchester, Virginia. During the following year the twenty-four-year-old Washington was commander on the Virginia frontier against any menace from the French and Indians, and to him Franklin writes that the Pennsylvania Assembly is no longer willing to maintain the post line to Winchester at its own expense; but that if Washington will induce Virginia to support the rider from Winchester to Carlisle, Franklin will undertake to persuade Pennsylvania to bear the expense between Carlisle and Philadelphia. Massachusetts, by the way, also established a war emergency post between Boston and Albany.

Quite naturally, some time was required for Franklin's improvements to bear fruit, and in his first four years the service showed a deficit of £943. But by that time an

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upward trend had appeared. In 1761 Franklin and Hunter were able to send £494 of net profit to headquarters, which the British authorities remarked, "is the first remittance ever made of the kind." Earnings continued to increase, and for the fiscal year 1768-1769, the net profits were £1,859; whereupon headquarters recorded that "the posts in America are under the management of persons of acknowledged ability." In 1774 the clear revenue reached £3,000. Franklin boasted that his postal service yielded to the crown more than three times the income of the Irish posts.

But, meanwhile, things were happening which disturbed the peace of life in the colonies, which discredited the British postal system on one side of the water and Franklin on the other. Franklin was in England from 1757 to 1762 as agent, or lobbyist, for the colonies, his colleague at home attending to the daily administrative task. Upon his return he made another tour of inspection in 1763, and an incident of his start gave great offense to Thomas Penn, the hereditary "Proprietor" of Pennsylvania. Franklin was a colonel of the Philadelphia volunteers, and a number of his officers "took it into their heads," as he records, to escort him a few miles out of the city. They were all in uniform, "and what made it worse, they drew their swords and rode with them naked all the way." The jealous Penn besought the Postmasters-General to remove so ambitious and factious a man, but his petition was in vain.

Nevertheless, Franklin was being more and more criticized in England because of his long absences from his postal job in America and because of his activities in behalf of the muttering colonists. He went to England again in 1764, and this time remained eleven years. The Stamp Act, passed by Parliament in 1765, infuriated America as nothing else had done, and Franklin labored hard to have it repealed. This was accomplished in 1766, but irreparable damage had

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been done, a bitterness had been engendered which finally fruited in revolution. Postage rates were reduced about thirty per cent in 1765, but that appeased the citizens but little; the Post Office, they declared, had become "a grievous instrument of taxation." The "Sons of Liberty" were organized, and one of their pronunciamientos was that ship captains must deliver their letters at the coffeehouses instead of at the post offices, as required by law. If the captains proved obstinate their letters were regretfully taken from them by force.

Slowly matters drifted towards a crisis. The temper into which the country had fallen is recorded again and again by Hugh Finlay, who made an inspection tour of the posts in 1773. Finlay, by the way, had been the organizer of the posts in Canada, of which territory the British secured full control in 1760. It had then no mail facilities to speak of, and Franklin and Foxcroft were instructed in 1763 to survey a route between Quebec and New York. They went to Canada and met Hugh Finlay, a young Scotchman, who offered to establish a regular post between Quebec and Montreal. He was appointed postmaster at Quebec and also styled controller of posts in Canada, one of his perquisites being the monopoly of licensing persons to supply horses and conveyances for the use of travelers.

The first postal vehicle used in Canada was called *caloche*, and evidently resembled the small French post cart of the late eighteenth century. Besides the courier and mail bag, two passengers might be squeezed in. The harness and lines were apt to contain as much rope and cord as leather. The roads were dreadful, and there were six ferries between Quebec and Montreal, one three miles wide and another three-quarters of a mile. There were no taverns between the two towns, and travelers had to carry their food with them. The couriers left twice a week and occupied ten days in the journey. The fee on a single letter from Quebec to

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Montreal was eightpence; nevertheless, the enterprise was a success, and Finlay gained so much respect that in 1773 he was ordered to make a survey of the posts in the colonies farther south and report on their condition and needs.

Leaving Quebec with some Indian guides, he traveled directly through the wilderness into Maine, the party using canoes whenever possible, packing boats and supplies across the divide, and sleeping out many nights in the wilds. Finlay's visit to Falmouth, Maine, was the first official call which that post office had ever enjoyed, and the postmaster had a fine string of complaints to make. Hearken to some of the woes of a colonial postmaster:

Mr. Child the deputy there represents that the employment is very troublesome to him and of no manner of advantage, nay that it is a loss to him, for he cannot withstand the earnest solicitations of indigent people who have letters by the post, he delivers them, and never receives payment.

Every person who looks for a letter or a newspaper freely enters his house, be it post day or not; he cannot afford to set apart a room in his house as an office; he is continually disturbed in his family, he therefore begs that some other person may be appointed in his stead.

There's two or three vessels in constant employment between Boston and Falmouth; they are called packets, each of them makes about twenty trips yearly, and every trip they carry many hundreds of letters. Mr. Child once attempted to put the Law in force and took the letter-bag of one of those vessels to his office, but it made such a bustle and noise in town that he dared never attempt it again.

Between Portsmouth and Boston one Stavers had for several years been operating a stage line, and he carried many letters. His drivers "were so artful that the postmaster cou'd not detect them," so it seemed that the only thing left was to take Stavers into the employ of the Post Office, which idea worked out very well; for the additional postage now

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collected on letters more than paid Stavers's ten pounds yearly salary.

The postmaster at Salem complained that most letters went privately and few by the post to or from his office. "If," comments Finlay, "an information were lodged (but an informer wou'd get tar'd and feather'd) no jury wou'd find the fact"; and then he adds a significant bit—his own digest of political opinion in the colonies: "It is deemed necessary to hinder all acts of Parliament from taking effect in America. They say they are to be governed by laws of their own framing and no other."

The easy-going life of the time is shown by the fact that Finlay found more than one postmaster gone out of town and the office closed or very nearly so. At Providence the postmaster, himself a publisher, told the inspector that after the mail from the West had reached New London, the postmaster there "extracts all advices from newspapers, which requires considerable time," then printed his own paper and forwarded it, together with the New York papers, by a private conveyance via Norwich to Providence, beating the regular mail by twelve or fourteen hours.

At Bristol, Rhode Island, the postal receipts for two years had amounted to no more than ten pounds. At Newport it was said that "there are two post-offices, the King's and Peter Mumford's" (Mumford being the postrider to Boston), and that Mumford's had the greatest revenue—about one hundred pounds a year. All privately carried letters were of course supposed to accompany merchandise; the postmaster at New Haven told Finlay that bundles of chips, straw or old paper were often used as the packages of merchandise. "The Portmanteaus seldom come locked; the consequence is that the riders stuff them with bundles of shoes, stockings, canisters, money or anything they get to carry, which tears the Portmanteaus and rubs the letters to pieces."

The two riders, Hurd and Peate, between New York and

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Saybrook "pretend that they are at great expense for horses; it is only a pretense; an ass could travel faster, they seldom or never change horses. They have excuses always ready framed when they come in late—'their horses lost shoes'—'they were detained at ferrys'—It is their own business alone which detains them. They have sometimes said that it was too hot to ride and at other times that it rain'd and they did not chuse to get wet." It was also reported that they were collecting excessive charges on letters. Old Hurd, by the way, when the war broke out in 1775, retired after forty-eight years of post riding, and in very comfortable circumstances.

In the southern colonies Finlay found postal arrangements still in a deplorably primitive condition. There was as yet no post office in the village of Richmond, Virginia. At Georgetown, South Carolina, the postmaster had died in October, and though it was now January, no successor had been appointed and there was no one to handle mail. The so-called roads from Wilmington to Charleston were inconceivably bad—"certainly the most tedious and disagreeable on the Continent of North America. Death is on the countenances of those you meet"—but fortunately, he added, you seldom meet anybody. There was no post line from Charleston to Savannah, though one was operating from Savannah to St. Augustine. Florida had been added to the British dominion in 1765.

But even while Finlay was riding down through the Carolinas, the patriots at Boston were hurling eighteen thousand pounds worth of British tea into the harbor. Strange, new ideas were seething. During 1773-1774 several proposals were actually made for the setting up of an American mail service independent of the British. The most noteworthy of these came from William Goddard, a Baltimore publisher, formerly postmaster at Providence. He had a complete scheme, which he explained in a tour of New York and New

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England, and it was well received everywhere. The spirit of revolt was gaining strength daily. Secret committees were at work in many places, sending news to each other by private hands, for fear that not all postmasters and riders might be on their side. Paul Revere, the romantic courier of the Revolution, was one of these secret riders. In May, 1774, he rode into New York and handed to the Committee of Fifty dispatches from Boston requesting co-operation in a boycott of all English trade until the ministry should reopen the port of Boston. He rode on to Philadelphia with his message, and when he came back, he was notified that the Committee of Fifty had passed resolutions for a convention of delegates from all the colonies. Thus began the Continental Congress.

Meanwhile, Franklin, in England, was accused of "pernicious activity" in behalf of the malcontents and was dismissed from his position. Foxcroft remained at his post until the beginning of the war.

The spring of 1775 brought the final breach on that momentous day at Lexington and Concord. Four days later, Israel Bessel, a postrider, came galloping down the Bowery Road into New York, breaking the Sabbath hush by shouting the amazing news to every group he passed. The Committee of Safety at Boston at once recommended the establishment of an independent postal system. The Continental Congress appointed a committee with Franklin at its head to perfect the organization. The New York Committee of Safety perpetrated a literary gem when they wrote to the Hartford Committee that "the Constitutional Post Office is now rising on the ruins of the Parliamentary one, which is just expiring in convulsions." A new list of patriotic post offices, published in May, shows one in every large town from Portsmouth to Williamsburg, Virginia. The one at Boston could not function, the city being in the hands of the British. Nevertheless, according to announcement:

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Nathan Bushnell, Jr. (Constitutional Post) proposes to carry letters, etc. to the camp at Roxbury and Cambridge and as often as practicable to Boston, leaving the printing office at New London at 7 o'clock Thursday evenings, Norwich at 9 o'clock Friday mornings; and to leave the camps at 9 o'clock Monday mornings, return the same road and arrive at New London Wednesday evenings.

One fears that Nathan did not find it "practicable" to get into Boston for some time.

When the news of Lexington reached New York, Finlay was there, consulting with Foxcroft. He started to return to Quebec, but as he neared Albany he heard that the provincials intended seizing him, and turned back to New York. He found the town in the hands of the rebels, but stole through and took refuge on a British sloop-of-war in the harbor, on which he later went to Boston. There he found another vessel to convey him to Quebec, although, as he said, "If report be true, even a passage by water is not without risk." He did his best to keep up communication and handle government dispatches in his territory, but on November 9, 1775, he writes:

My courier from Montreal on Monday was robbed of the mail. The courier from Quebec on the same day being informed that a party of armed men lay in wait of him near Berthier, saved his mail by returning to town. From this day all postal matters are stayed in this province.

This was just when the American forces under Arnold and Montgomery were marching into Canada and were being aided by many rebel sympathizers in that province. Not until the wasted little Continental force was compelled to retreat back into New York in the following spring was Finlay able to restore his mail service.

Meanwhile the Constitutional post rapidly took possession

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of all the mail lines. Its postmen now rode twice a week out of New York and Philadelphia, meeting at Princeton to exchange bags. Some of the old postmen simply continued their routes, affirming an allegiance to the new cause which had long been in their hearts. Others suspected of Toryism were replaced. So quickly and completely did the patriotic post kill that of the crown that on May 4th, only two weeks after Lexington, Foxcroft, for lack of funds, discharged what few riders he had left.

CHAPTER XVI

EARLIER YEARS OF THE AMERICAN POST OFFICE

Carrier of news and knowledge,
Instrument of trade and industry,
Promoter of mutual acquaintance,
Of peace and good will
Among men and nations.

CHARLES W. ELIOT and WOODROW WILSON

THE Continental Congress, in July, 1775, passed its Post Office Act, establishing a line of posts from Falmouth, Maine, to Savannah, Georgia, with as many cross lines as the Postmaster-General might think necessary—and Franklin was the new Postmaster-General. He received a salary of one thousand dollars a year, and was allowed three hundred and forty dollars for a secretary and comptroller. He appointed his son-in-law, Richard Bache, comptroller, and William Goddard, who had organized the Continental post, was made surveyor. For a time the old British rates of postage were continued. Franklin, who, when serving under the British crown, had franked his letters thus, "Free, B. Franklin," now jovially superscribed them in honor of the spirit of the times, "B. Free Franklin."

Perhaps the main problem of the new system was that of keeping up fast communication between Congress and the armies in the field. This was maintained remarkably well, considering the circumstances; but the task of handling the private correspondence of the citizens was often sadly interrupted, as this and that city or district fell into the hands of the enemy. Many a daring ride, many a stealthy journey by night, many a narrow escape were those of the patriotic

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letter carriers. New York was a typical example of an occupied town. When it was taken by the British in the summer of 1776, the Constitutional post office, which had had so much fun frightening and maddening prominent Tories with its inflammatory handbills and threatening letters, retreated up through Westchester County with Washington's army. It was located at Dobbs Ferry for a while, then with the Provincial Congress at Fishkill, which was also near Washington and his army post office. Meanwhile, if you were a patriot in the city and wished to post a letter, you took it to Hercules Cronk's house at the river bank on the outskirts of town, "where the post master might be heard of." Thence the letters were carried by messengers on foot who stole up through the Westchester hills in imminent peril of hanging if they were caught by the enemy.

In December, 1775, an express service for government dispatches only was set up from Cambridge to Philadelphia by way of Hartford, crossing the Hudson at Dobbs Ferry. The riders were to travel day and night and be paid twelpence a mile, Pennsylvania currency, in winter, or eightpence in summer. Postmasters and postriders were exempted from all military duties. Later the stages over which the carriers rode were shortened to from twenty-five to thirty miles. Armed dispatch boats were run to connect the southerly colonies with Congress, then sitting at Philadelphia.

The new government, having at first no currency of its own, mail rates were computed in pennyweights and grains of silver. Thus a letter traveling not more than sixty miles was to cost one pennyweight eight grains, which, calculating a grain at threepence, was very similar to the old British rate. But it was soon found that the receipts did not even pay the salaries of the postriders. One of its faults was that there was too much franking. All mail sent or received by members of Congress went free, as did that of the army officers and, later, even of the private soldiers. To Jef-

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person, who complained of the slow mail service in 1777, John Adams wrote in its defense:

A committee on the post office have found a thousand difficulties. The post is now extremely regular from north to south though it comes but once a week. It is very difficult to get faithful riders to go oftener. And the expense is very high, and the profits, so dear is everything and so little correspondence is carried on except in franked letters, will not support the office.

Late in 1776 Franklin went to France as agent of the colonies, and Bache became Postmaster-General. The new surveyor was Ebenezer Hazard, an able and active man who had been postmaster at New York when the war opened. An inspector of dead letters was a new functionary appointed at a salary of one hundred dollars a year, one of his duties being that of reporting to Congress anything inimical to the government which he found in the undelivered mail.

Post-office matters went from bad to worse—one reason being the new government's habit of printing paper money with no backing for it. The postal system showed a deficit every year. The postriders went unpaid, and the postmasters who loaned them money could recover nothing, either from the riders or from the government. The Postmaster-General's salary was raised every year and sometimes oftener, but as he couldn't collect it, the advances seemed to do him little good. Bache wrote, "We are compelled to pay our riders eight times as much as was paid to them in the first year of the establishment," but as the pay was in paper money, the riders still seemed to be dissatisfied. The postage rates were doubled in the spring of 1779, and in the fall they were made twenty times what they were in 1775. In 1780 they were doubled again; but all these rates were calculated in Continental money, which meant little.

But let it not be thought that in this seeming desert of

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trouble there were no oases of calm, nay, almost of contentment. A pretty picture dated 1779 is that which Mrs. Eliza Morton Quincy draws in her memoirs. She was then a child, living at "Baskinridge," as she calls it, in the Jerseys. The war had receded from those parts. The British had been driven from Philadelphia, and though they were still in New York, less than thirty miles from her home, this seemed to trouble the countryside but little:

Mr. Martin was an old man who carried the mail between Philadelphia and Morristown, and was called "The Post." He

George Town from Jan 3^d

<i>Letters received 1778</i>		<i>Letters sent</i>	
<i>Jan 17. May Letters</i>	<i>5.8</i>	<i>Jan 7 Charles Town</i>	<i>1.8</i>
<i>18 Charles Town</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>15 Boston</i>	<i>26.8</i>
<i>28 Newburn</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>2 Providence</i>	<i>13.8</i>
<i>4.32. Ladies</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>22 Charles Town</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>19 Newburn</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>23 Detton</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Way</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>23 Newburn</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Newburn</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Wilmington</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Charles Town</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Charles Town</i>	<i>3</i>
	<i>2</i>	<i>28 Charles Town</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>71.8</i>	<i>Mid. Williamsburg</i>	<i>7</i>
	<i>2</i>	<i>Baltimore</i>	<i>12</i>
	<i>73.8</i>	<i>Newburn</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>10</i>		
	<i>63.8</i>		

ACCOUNT OF BUSINESS DONE AT GEORGETOWN, SOUTH CAROLINA, POST OFFICE FOR THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1778

used to wear a blue coat with yellow buttons, a scarlet waistcoat, leathern small clothes, blue yarn stockings and a red wig and cocked hat, which gave him a sort of military appearance. He usually travelled in a sulky but sometimes in a chaise or on horseback, according to the season of the year, or the size and weight of the mail bag. Mr. Martin also contrived to employ himself in knitting coarse yarn stockings while seated on his saddle-bags on horseback. He certainly did not ride *post*, according to the present meaning of the term.

Between Baskinridge and Philadelphia and Princeton he was the constant medium of communication, and always stopped at

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our house to refresh himself and his horse, tell the news and bring packets. He was an excellent, honest old man. . . .

Once when she went on a visit to Philadelphia, the little girl came back as a passenger with Mr. Martin in his chaise. Fortunately, he was not using his sulky on that trip; another observer tells us that the sulky of those days was just "a common arm chair placed on leather braces and suspended over a couple of wheels." It was said of the postal service of that time that it robbed the cradle and the grave, for some of the riders, in strong contrast to the ancient Mr. Martin, were mere boys just entering their teens.

Perhaps Martin knitted socks to piece out his income; some of the other riders were disgruntled and were again carrying letters for their own profit. Even government express riders did it. Ship captains disregarded the law; the condition of the roads was growing worse, and in some remote places letters lay in offices for months because there was no money to carry them on their way. By the fall of 1780 the government's rag money was practically worthless. Surveyor Hazard was drawing \$40 a day salary, but his expenses for board and lodging for himself and horse were \$289 Continental, or $7\frac{2}{90}$ dollars in real money. As matters had almost reached a standstill under such conditions, Congress was forced to put the postal system on a specie basis, reducing the Postmaster-General's salary to \$1,000 in hard money, and other officials in proportion. Postriders were promised that the losses they had suffered would be made up, and they were given double the salary they drew before the war. High postage rates having proven a failure, Congress now went to the other extreme and fixed them at one-half the rates prevailing under British rule. But this was impracticable and was never put into effect; and in 1781 the rates were settled at double those of the British Post Office.

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In 1782 a new and more complete postal act was passed. A curious provision in it was that which authorized the Postmaster-General to "license" riders to carry newspapers at such rates as he chose to establish, the riders getting their pay on a commission arrangement. Postmasters were commanded not to deliver letters unless the postage was paid, but in many places this was ignored and citizens ran accounts with the post office by the month and year. The financial condition of the system was reported to be showing a slight improvement, but even in that year Washington is found writing to the Quartermaster-General that delays in Count



THE FLYING MACHINE MAIL STAGE BETWEEN NEW YORK AND PHILADELPHIA, 1786, AS SHOWN IN ITS ADVERTISEMENT

Rochambeau's letters have occurred doubtless because of "the want of money to support the expresses." He remarks that the deputy quartermaster for Maryland "informs me that the want of money for the riders renders it extremely difficult for him to forward letters through his district."

A curious development of the time was the existence for several months after the treaty of peace had been signed of both French and British post offices in New York City in connection with their packet service—the only time in American history when this has been true.

Ebenezer Hazard was made Postmaster-General in 1782 and under his vigorous direction the service was slowly improved. There was ample room for improvement, as letters

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of the time attest. Jefferson, then in Philadelphia, writes to Francis Eppes in Virginia in March, 1783:

I hope by the next post to receive a letter from you, though after near three months' absence without having ever heard a word of my dear ones, I shall receive your letter with fear and trembling, lest any accident should have happened.

The correspondence of Washington from Mount Vernon with persons in New York and Philadelphia in 1784 frequently mentions letters which had been a month and more



THE "OLD LINE OF STAGES" BETWEEN NEW YORK AND PHILADELPHIA, 1786

on the road. The general grows sarcastic in a letter to General Knox in February of that year:

The bad weather and the great care which the post riders take of themselves prevented your letters of the 3d and 9th of last month from getting to my hands till the 10th of this.

Hazard at first made extensive trial of stagecoaches for mail service. Stages had not been long in use in America. The first one in New England began operating in 1744, and the first between Philadelphia and New York started from the former city in 1756, making the run in three days. About 1766 a new one, The Flying Machine, "being a good wagon with seats on springs" (if we are to judge by its

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picture in the advertisements, it somewhat resembled the covered wagon of '49) reduced the time to two days. As time went on, stages appeared on other roads.

By the end of 1785 Hazard had the mails traveling in stagecoaches over most of the "great post road" from Portsmouth to Savannah, and from New York to Albany. Over these routes mail went three times a week in summer and twice a week in winter. The law allowed a stop of fifteen minutes at small towns and two hours at the larger ones. But often the schedules specified by the Post Office were inconvenient for the stages, interfering with their passenger business, and they showed a tendency to vary them as they pleased, to say nothing of being very careless with the mail bags. Such items as this are significant:

FREDERICKSBURG, VA.—The *Northern Mail* which was due yesterday at one o'clock, is not yet received.—The stage arrived at the usual hour, and the mail is supposed to be left at Dumfries, through the inattention of the driver.

One night the mail from Philadelphia lay until morning, forgotten, in the ferryhouse at New York, was found by a little negro boy and carried to his home where it was kicked about for some hours before older persons discovered it and delivered it to the post office. The stage drivers, too, despite the law, were carrying letters privately. It was in those years that the phrase, "This is a free country," was being bandied about in extenuation of any casual disregard of the law—an idea whose baneful interpretations have been a curse to us, even to this day.

Another difficulty which the loose-jointed Confederation of States imposed upon the Post Office was that of the cheap paper money issued by the various commonwealths. Hazard instructed his postmasters not to accept it for postage—which of course caused widespread indignation and many protests. One difficulty found in carrying out his rule was

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that in some districts there was no other money in circulation, no specie to be had. Congress therefore backed up the Postmaster-General by directing that the postage on letters sent into these rag-money territories must be prepaid.

Overriding all these difficulties, Hazard slowly brought his system into better shape, and it now began to be more appreciated and used by the people. Letters were rare and cherished documents in those days when a distance of a hundred miles from friend or kinsman meant more than a thousand do to-day. Nay, we can send a letter to Asia now in less time than was required then to carry one from New York to a Georgia village. McMaster, in a beautiful pen picture of the after-Revolutionary period, says:

Many incentives to letter-writing then existed which the railroad, the steamboat and the telegraph have destroyed. Men of the same family or who had grown up in the same village and known each other at school, or who had fought side by side under Washington or Gates, were constantly exchanging letters or notes.

Few to-day, he adds, have the time or the inclination for such correspondence, nor do they write of the same subjects. No one now would think of telling a distant friend of the result of an election or of the recent acts of the Legislature or the price of commodities, or anything that can be read in the newspapers; but all this our ancestors communicated by letters.

No city in 1784 had a public library, no tavern its reading room where papers from every State in the Union could be seen. For such information a man was dependent upon his correspondents alone. He therefore wrote and received letters in which, among assurances of friendship and esteem, thanks for small favors conferred, are mingled items full of interest to the historian. It is from this source alone that a just and accurate knowledge is to be obtained of many great events and many stirring times

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[such as the Whisky Insurrection, Shay's Rebellion, the fears of the people during the long session of the Constitutional Convention]. Nor should it be forgotten that such missives were highly prized by the recipient; for the difficulties of transmitting letters were many and the rates of postage high. . . .

On the day when the post rider was due, a day not known by its name as set down in the weekly calendar, but as "post day," half the village assembled to be present at the distribution of the mail, which in good and bad weather alike, took place at the inn. The package for the whole village was generally made up of a roll of newspapers a week old and a few bundles of drugs for the doctor. It was a great day whereon, in addition to the usual post, a half-dozen letters were given out. Then, as the townsmen pressed around the inn door to make arrangement for borrowing the "newsprint" or to hear the contents of it read aloud by the minister or landlord, the postman was carried home by one of the throng to share the next repast, at which, as the listeners preserved an admiring silence, he dispensed the news and gossip collected along the way.

But there were variations from the scene just pictured. An old citizen of Mount Holly, New Jersey,* describes the spectacle at the market place in his home town, where the whipping post and the maypole still stood, when the stage from Philadelphia arrived with the mail:

The people would gather around and the stage driver would call out the names of persons for whom he had newspapers. Two persons then often joined in taking one paper; one subscriber would read it on the evening of its arrival and pass it over to his neighbor next morning.

In 1787 a number of cross-post lines were authorized. Springfield and Albany, Baltimore and Annapolis, for example, were to be connected, and lines ran inland to towns such as Camden, South Carolina. One was even planned

* Richard Cox Shreve.

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to Pittsburgh. Many of these cross lines were farmed out to contractors, and thus began the private post road, predecessor of the "star route," both important features of our postal history.

Newspapers still were not officially admitted to the mails, the riders carrying them by special arrangement, as they had done for decades past. The editors then relied heavily for news and for supposed digests of public opinion upon exchange copies of other newspapers. In the winter of 1787-1788, when excitement was running high over the possible adoption or rejection of the new Constitution, a great hullabaloo arose over the charge that newspapers had been held back by the Post Office. The opponents of the Constitution, astounded at their defeat, threw the blame on the Federalist-operated mail system. Information, they said, which would have changed many votes was suppressed. It was asserted that for weeks Boston had not seen a newspaper from west of the Hudson, nor even a copy of the *New York Packet* or Greenleaf's *New York Journal*, containing the powerful anti-Federal articles of "Brutus," "Cato" and "Cincinnatus." "Centinel," writing in the *Independent Gazetteer*, with a tremendous pretense of caution lest he be arrested for treason or *lèse-majesté*, fumed against those "heinous" acts, "the suppression of the circulation of the newspapers from state to state by the of—c—rs of the P—t-O—ce." Their action was "highly prejudicial to the public welfare and at this great crisis peculiarly alarming and threatening to liberty." He says that editor Greenleaf of the *New York Journal*, who received only two copies of southern newspapers during the convention ("and they contained no information") "affected to ascribe this to the negligence of the p——t boy, not caring to quarrel with the p—t m—t—r g——l."

Some charged that the postriders had been bought off; others that Postmaster-General Hazard had seized the occasion to put into effect his long-threatened suppression of the

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printers' free exchanges. Even Washington was misled by the clamor and wrote to John Jay that

it is extremely to be lamented that a new arrangement in the Post Office unfavorable to the circulation of intelligence should have taken place at the instant when the momentous question of a general government was to have come before the people.

Hazard denied any idea of interference with the news. Most of the Philadelphia publishers signed a statement to the effect that during the Constitutional Convention their exchanges had come as usual. The charges in general were refuted.

Washington also criticized Hazard because he had recently taken some of the mails away from stagecoaches and put them on horseback again. The general and many others could not see this as anything but a backward step. But Hazard was acting, as he believed, in the best interests of the service. In New England he found the riders far cheaper than the stages, and, furthermore, our roads in general were still so bad that a single horse could make much better time than a vehicle. Some writers even in recent times have been inclined to argue that our latter eighteenth-century roads compared favorably with those of other countries. If this be true, then other countries certainly had some pretty bad roads.

It is pointed out that John Macadam, who caused a sensation in Great Britain with his stone-surfaced roads, went from this country to England in 1783 and had seen such roads in use here before he departed—the Boston and Salem Turnpike, for example, and the pike from Salem to Andover. But there were only a few short stretches of road like that in America. Through most of the country the method had been substantially that described to the writer by a southern rural commentator, "Just cut a right of way through the woods, and trust to God for the rest." Josiah Quincy's

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description of a mail-coach journey in the winter of 1794-1795, over so well-traveled a road as that between Boston and New York does not argue very eloquently in favor of the roads nor of the stages as mail carriers:

I set out from Boston . . . in the line of stages lately established by an enterprising Yankee, Pease by name, which at that day was considered a method of transportation of wonderful expedition. . . . The carriages were old and shackling, and much of the harness was made of ropes. One pair of horses carried the stage eighteen miles. We generally reached our resting place, if no accident intervened, at ten o'clock, and after a frugal supper went to bed with a notice that we should be called at three the next morning—which generally proved to be half past two. Then, whether it snowed or rained, the traveller must rise and make ready by the help of a horn lantern and a farthing candle, and proceed on his way over bad roads—sometimes with a driver showing no doubtful symptoms of drunkenness, which good-hearted passengers never failed to improve at every stopping place by urging upon him the comfort of another glass of toddy. Thus we travelled, eighteen miles at a stage, sometimes obliged to get out and help the coachman lift the coach out of a quagmire or rut, and arrived in New York after a week's hard travelling, wondering at the ease as well as expedition with which our journey was accomplished.

Jocular confirmation of his reference to the driver's toddy is given by Philip Freneau in his poem on the country printer:

Three times a week, by nimble geldings drawn
A stage arrives, but scarcely deigns to stop,
Unless the driver, far in liquor gone,
Has made some business for the blacksmith shop.

Thomas Twining, a traveler of 1795, describes an American mail coach as "a long car with four benches, holding nine passengers and the driver. The light roof was supported

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by eight slender pillars, and from it hung three leather curtains, which were rolled up at the pleasure of the passengers." There was no place for luggage save in front of the passengers, and no backs to the benches. Isaac Weld, another traveler of 1795, presents a drawing of a mail coach which coincides pretty well with Twining's description. Weld said that on some roads the driver called to the passengers to lean first to one side, then to the other

to prevent the coach from oversetting in the deep ruts with which the road abounds: "Now, gentlemen, to the right;" upon which the passengers all stretched their bodies half way out of the carriage to balance it on that side: "Now, gentlemen, to the left;" and so on. This was found absolutely necessary at least a dozen times in half the number of miles. . . .

If the road runs contiguous to a wood, then, instead of mending it where it is bad, they open a new passage through the trees, which they call making a road. It is very common in Maryland to see six or seven roads branching out from one, which all lead to the same place. . . . The dexterity with which the drivers guide their horses along these new roads, which are filled with the stumps of trees, is astonishing.

In February, 1796, the road between Baltimore and Philadelphia became so bad that traffic was stopped for ten or twelve days, or until a hard frost made it passable again.

Nevertheless, Hazard had added the stagecoach owners to his enemies, and when the new government was set up in 1789, it was evident that his days were numbered. He was succeeded by Samuel Osgood, who served less than two years, and was followed in 1791 by that vigorous patriot, Timothy Pickering.

When our present form of government began in 1789, we had in all our territory only seventy-five post offices and about twenty-four hundred miles of post roads, serving a population of three million. Postmaster-General Osgood, reporting to the Secretary of the Treasury in 1790, said,



From Isaac Weld's "Travels"

AN AMERICAN STAGECOACH OF 1795



From United States Post Office Department

A POSTRIDER OF 1785

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"The gross receipts in any one year have not exceeded thirty-five thousand dollars, and for the last two years have been at about twenty-five thousand dollars a year." Among the causes of this poor revenue he cites the heavy rates of postage; that on a letter from New York to Savannah, for example, being thirty-six cents, which "almost amounts to a prohibition of communication through the Post Office." Finally, this was still so emphatically a free country that the rules of the service could not be enforced, either on employees or the public, and even a strict accounting of receipts could not be obtained.

During Osgood's administration, he had for office a room connected with that of the city post office in New York. The primitive condition of the service is very happily set forth in a letter from Pickering to Secretary of the Treasury Hamilton in March, 1792, just after the former had taken over the postmaster-generalship:

SIR.

After much inquiry, I have found a house which should accommodate my numerous family & at the same time give me office room. The *greatly extended* business of the department I think may be accomplished with the *same help* which has been used since the time of Mr. Osgood's appointment; to wit, an assistant and a clerk. For these, with their necessary writing-desk, table, boxes, cases, and shelves, for a considerable bulk of books and papers, would sufficiently occupy one room; and another would be convenient for myself. A servant will also be wanted to keep the rooms in order, make fires and perform other services. These services, however, not being constant, I could employ a *domestic* servant, but one selected with a reference to such public service. If, for the two rooms for the General Post Office, a cellar for wood and the necessary attendance of my domestic servant, I might make a charge of about three hundred dollars, I would then engage the house referred to; but previous to such engagement, I wish to obtain your opinion of the propriety of the charge.

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Hamilton in his reply says that, after careful study of the question, "I cannot perceive anything in the arrangement you propose but what appears consistent with the interests of the United States."

The seat of government had been removed to Philadelphia just before Pickering went into office. The city post offices in Philadelphia and Boston at that time occupied each one room in a private dwelling. At Philadelphia there were two clerks at a yearly salary of five hundred dollars each; but the two clerks in New York drew only four hundred dollars each. Even so, conditions there were better than before the Revolution, when Postmaster Colden's daughter could not be spared for a visit out of town because she was his only help in the office—and drew no pay for it, at that. Each of these large offices in 1790 was being allowed fifty dollars yearly for fuel and candles. The aggregate pay of all the postmasters in the United States in 1791 was only \$9,336.

Jefferson, then Secretary of State, was much dissatisfied with the slowness of the mails. He had read of Palmer's speeding up of the service in England, and wished to see the same progress here. He believed that by combining coach and horseback carriers, this might be accomplished. In a note to Pickering, dated March 9, 1792, he begins:

The President has desired me to confer with you on the proposition I made the other day of endeavoring to move the posts at the rate of one hundred miles a day. It is believed to be practicable here, because it is practicable in every other country. . . .

He then invites Pickering to dine with him and go over the matter. His idea was to use the stages, which did not travel all night, and when they stopped for the night, have a rider ready to carry the bag forward. But the country was so poor that almost any scheme they might devise in-

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volved an expense of which Congress would not approve. Pickering did succeed in cutting the time of the New York-Philadelphia mail, which had hitherto occupied the better part of two days in its passage, leaving each city at 8 A.M., stopping somewhere overnight and arriving at 1 P.M. or after next day. By starting at 2 A.M. and pushing hard, the journey of nearly a hundred miles was now accomplished in less than twenty-four hours; and this, it was believed, was the highest speed that would ever be possible.

By 1799 the mail coaches on the eastern lines must have presented a gorgeous appearance, judging from the Postmaster-General's directions as to their decoration:

The body painted green, colors formed of Prussian blue and yellow ochre; carriage and wheels red lead mixed to approach vermilion as near as may be, octagon panel in the back, black; octagon blinds green; elbow piece or rail, front rail and back rail, red as above; on the doors, Roman capitals in patent yellow, "United States Mail Stage," and over these words a spread eagle of a size and color to suit.

One of Pickering's early official acts was the signing of a postal treaty with our old friend, Hugh Finlay, now Postmaster-General of Canada; one of the first steps in that progress of amity and understanding which constitutes the joint history of our northern neighbor and ourselves, extending even to the present day.

CHAPTER XVII

A PERIOD OF MAGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Let us conquer space. It is thus that a citizen of the West will read the news of Boston still moist from the press. The mail and the press are the nerves of the body politic. By them the slightest impression made on the most remote parts is communicated to the whole system; and the more perfect the means of transportation, the more rapid and true the vibration.

JOHN C. CALHOUN

BOTH Osgood and Pickering urged that "our fellow-citizens in remote parts of the Union"—now becoming much more numerous, by the way—deserved cheaper rates and better facilities. They were supported by Congress to the best of its ability, and the last decade of the century accordingly witnessed a rapid extension of mail lines into the wilderness, not only of the West and South but of the North. Western New York, to be specific, was just about as wild when the Union was formed as the Ohio country and beyond there. There was no settlement of any consequence west of Albany. In 1800 there were only four cabins on the site of Buffalo. In 1810 the site of Rochester was a forest, and a tiny salt-boiling hamlet called Salina was the embryo of the future city of Syracuse.

The first post that ventured west of Albany was a foot carrier who began his trips to Utica in 1793. Four years later mail was being carried on horseback at long intervals to the Genesee and Niagara. But by 1805 a four-horse mail coach was running from Utica to Canandaigua. From there

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to the new post office of Buffalo Creek the mail even as late as 1812 went only once a week on horseback, being carried most of the time by a woman; whence sprang an exquisite and highly durable joke used all along the line, in the form of a question as to whether the fe-mail had yet arrived. With the building of the Erie Canal, 1817 to 1825, this section "boomed," new towns sprang up overnight and mails became a daily habit.

Long Island, now predominantly urban, was then undeniably backwoods. The British had given it some postal facilities, but the roads were so bad that the service was withdrawn before the Revolution. For a number of years a "respectable old Scotchman named Dunbar" rode a private, volunteer post from New York east through Babylon to Brookhaven. Until nearly 1800 the island had not a single post office. Early in the nineteenth century a stage line was established, the vehicle leaving Brooklyn Thursday morning and reaching Easthampton by Saturday night. The mail was delivered in casual fashion. If a town were as much as half a mile or a mile off the regular post route, the busy carrier would leave its letters in a box affixed to a tree or on a rock designated for the purpose.

Even before the post horn was heard in the New York wilderness beyond Utica, the Ohio Valley was given service. Pittsburgh had received its first regular mail on horseback in 1788; in 1794 it threw out a line overland to Wheeling, whence boats were to carry the mail down the Ohio to Limestone, Kentucky. From there a new road on the south side of the river continued the route to the mouth of the Licking, opposite Fort Washington or Losantiville, which had just about decided to rechristen itself Cincinnati.

A man named Green, of Marietta, at first contracted to carry the mail all the way from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati in a canoe; but his efforts were too puny for the growing needs of the country, and three boats were specially constructed

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for the service. They were poled and rowed by five men each. Passengers were carried downstream, but not up, as all extra weight must be avoided. Rufus Putnam, superintendent of the Ohio Company and later Surveyor-General, set a schedule for the mail boats which reads very quaintly, as for example, Boat No. 1 was to leave Marietta "every Monday Morning at Five O'Clock or the evening before if She chuses. She will make her passage up the river so as to Deliver the Mail at the Post Office at Wheeling the next Wednesday Evening unless a very extreordinary Fresh in the river shall render it empracticable which will very sildom if ever happen."

As it proved, an "extreordinary Fresh" did sometimes interfere, and in the winter ice blocked it for long periods. Neither was the danger from Indians yet past. The post office at Cincinnati began operations in 1794 in the cabin of Abner Dunn, the postmaster. But even after it had been operating six months, deliveries were so slow and irregular that the *Centinel of the Northwest Territory*, the only newspaper in town, could not find sufficient news, and the editor announced that until further notice he would devote his first page to printing the laws of the Territory.

Western postmasters were much more rigorous in business than those in the old, easy-going East. Dunn in a newspaper advertisement warned "those who have a right to calculate on receiving letters or papers at his office that in future they must come prepared with ready cash in hand, or no letters or papers." Postmaster Hogan at Chicago a few years later even upset during his term the old friendly custom of calling for all the neighbors' mail: "Any person calling for letters for their friends will please bring written order for them, to prevent mistake."

The Ohio River boats proving not entirely satisfactory, the mail presently began to be carried overland across southern Ohio, by way of Zane's trading post. In the *Centinel*



From United States Post Office Department

REINDEER MAIL SLEDS IN ALASKA



From United States Post Office Department

A HORSE SLED WITH HANDLES FOR THE WINTER MAIL BETWEEN MCCALL AND WARREN, IDAHO

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late in 1795 John G. McDowell announced that he had contracted to carry the mails between Cincinnati and Graham's Station; he would arrive at Cincinnati on Monday at twelve o'clock noon and remain until the following morning, "which is giving a sufficient time for the inhabitants of Cincinnati to answer their letters."

In 1794, the year of the Ohio extension, a line was also put through from Philadelphia to Knoxville, Tennessee, via Staunton and Abingdon; and from Abingdon a branch soon began operating to Danville and Lexington, Kentucky. A little later Louisville and Nashville were added to this system, and by 1800 a post was going from Louisville to Vincennes once a week, and from Vincennes to Cahokia every two weeks; an extension of more than fifteen hundred miles in six years.

The Ohio business soon made it necessary for the Western rider leaving Philadelphia to lead an extra horse behind him. The Postmaster-General in 1796 said, "The western mail weighs 120 pounds, and is too heavy to be carried on one horse." The problems of the department were coming thick and fast. Detroit needed service, but in 1800 it did not yet seem practicable to run a mail line to that village from Pittsburgh, the distance was so great and the country so sparsely populated. There was only an Indian foot trail and no accommodations anywhere for the postriders. In 1802 a line was attempted from Cincinnati to Detroit, but the service was slow and irregular. The first government post office was opened in Detroit January 1, 1803, in a little trading store.

Meanwhile a line from Pittsburgh to Warren, Ohio, had been set up, and a little later it was extended to the Cuyahoga (Cleveland). In 1805 a post office was opened in Cleveland, the first quarter's receipts being \$2.83. That same year "two faithful, enterprising, hardy young woodsmen" were engaged to carry the mail by land from Cleveland

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to Detroit, an attempt at service by water being given up because of the storms which so frequently tormented Lake Erie. The "great black swamp," a thirty-mile stretch, mostly timbered, between Toledo and Sandusky Bay, was only one of the obstacles which these sturdy postmen had to encounter.

To the central portion of the Louisiana Territory—that is to say, Missouri and thereabouts—there had been a considerable emigration from the states even before 1800, when the Territory was under Spanish rule. Many immigrants came from Kentucky, that great colonizer of the West, in the wake of Daniel Boone. The vicinity of Boone's final home, west of St. Louis, began to be known as the Boone's Lick Country; and frequent letters came westward in the pockets or saddlebags of travelers, traders, *courriers du bois* or other immigrants, addressed vaguely but hopefully to So-and-so, "In the Boone's Lick Country." As this embraced an area as large as some of the states, the chances of delivery would not seem to have been very rosy. As a rule, the letter would eventually be stuck up on the wall of some log tavern barroom to await the call of the addressee. Letters were matters of vast importance in that day and region, and in a surprising number of cases Mr. So-and-so, perhaps a hundred miles distant, would hear that a letter was awaiting him at Francois Petitjean's tavern. If, however, the addressee was not found within six months or so, such letters began to be regarded as "dead," and settlers in the neighborhood, yearning for news from old Kentucky, would finally open them to see if by chance there might be any word therein of some one they knew or of conditions in general in the old commonwealth.

To southward, a post office had been established at Memphis in 1800, and postriders began jogging over the old Natchez Trace between Nashville and Natchez in 1801. They left Nashville on Sunday at 9 A.M. and reached McIn-

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tosh's Station in the Chickasaw country the next Friday evening. Here they rested until Sunday morning, when they left at five o'clock and reached Natchez the following Saturday about 2 P.M.—making the five-hundred-mile journey in a trifle less than two weeks. Blockhouses were built along the way for protection and for housing the rider's spare horses.

The acquisition of the Louisiana Territory in 1803 brought new and tremendous responsibilities upon the Post Office Department. This new land, and particularly the southern portion of it, was separated from the settled states by a vast wilderness, large sections of which were infested by none too friendly Indians. Neither were the French population of New Orleans and vicinity friendly to the idea of being citizens of the United States; in fact, many were outraged at the thought. The difficulties of changing the post office in New Orleans to an institution conducted in English were both ludicrous and maddening. "I cannod rid Anglish, me," stubbornly and even proudly reiterated, was a sufficient reason for refusing to do business in anything but French.

At first, mail from the states reached New Orleans by an extension of the line from Natchez. But this was not sufficiently direct. Other routes suggested were for a time considered too dangerous. Finally, in 1805, treaties were made with the Indians by which the Cherokees granted a right of way for the mail through their country, down the Tennessee Valley from Knoxville and thence to the Tombigbee settlements. At the same time the Creeks granted a way from Okmulgee to the Mobile River, agreeing themselves to clear a horse trail and lay logs over the broad creeks. They were to keep boats at the river crossings and provide entertainment for men and horses.

Further north in the new Territory, St. Louis, Cape Girardeau and New Madrid, which, under French rule, had received only occasional mails forwarded up the river from

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New Orleans, were given United States post lines in 1804. It is said of Rufus Easton, the first postmaster at St. Louis, that a part of his official duty consisted of keeping an eye on those alleged near-traitors, Aaron Burr and General Wilkinson.

Already stagecoaches had begun running from Petersburg, Virginia, to Augusta, Georgia, and soon a new line to New Orleans was laid out through the Carolinas and Georgia. Some of the toils of the frontier postrider may be faintly envisioned from Postmaster-General Granger's report for 1806. Speaking of the stretch between Athens, Georgia and New Orleans, he says:

This part of the route ought to be surveyed and marked out and cleared of underbrush and trees, four feet wide. It would be rather an injury than an advantage to clear wider than is necessary for a single horse, as it has been found to encourage a thick growth of brush. . . .

Dog River is 40 feet wide and is too deep to ride whenever there is considerable rain. Two logs may be laid across it, so as to enable the rider to cross with the mails on his back and swim the horse alongside.

Pascagoula River is 250 feet wide. A family lives near and keeps a canoe, in which the rider with the mail should be crossed, the horse swimming alongside the canoe.

Negro slaves were frequently used as postriders in the South, and seemed to handle the job about as well as white men. The practice excited some uneasiness, however, and there were protests against it. It was pointed out that only the more intelligent men were employed, and that they might acquire knowledge which would make them dangerous. Finally a law of 1802 forbade the use of any save a free white person as carrier, and negroes did not appear again in the mail service until after the Civil War.

In 1810 Granger congratulates Congress on the tremendous

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strides made by the service. At the beginning of the century, "It required to write from Portland to Savannah and receive an answer, forty days; now only twenty-seven days." Then a letter from Philadelphia to Lexington, Kentucky, took thirty-two days in transit; now, sixteen days. The time then from Philadelphia to Nashville was forty-four days, now it was thirty; then twenty days between New York and Canandaigua, now twelve. Some of the improved schedules he mentioned were not always realized, but there had really been a great advance in ten years.

It is true that under the constant urging of President Jefferson, Granger was bringing the mails in the more settled communities to a greater regularity, and was gradually increasing their speed everywhere. Strenuous endeavors were made to expedite the service to New Orleans, in which the President was particularly interested. Plans were made to reduce the time from Washington to New Orleans to seventeen days and even to thirteen; but these were not realized until years after Jefferson's time. Granger wrote to the Agent of the Post Office in the southern Indian country, "In the selection of riders, you must always take persons of integrity, sound health, firmness, perseverance and high ambition, pride of character. Among these a preference is due to young men, the less their size the better." "The mail is not to stop," said another order, "except five minutes once in ten miles to breathe the horse and twenty minutes for breakfast and supper and thirty minutes for dinner." The riders must have lights so that they could travel at night, for darkness was to be no excuse for delaying the mails.

The heavy handicap under which men labored then because of the slowness with which information was transmitted was painfully emphasized in connection with the two great closing incidents of the War of 1812. Every one remembers that more than two thousand luckless men were

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slaughtered and maimed in battle at New Orleans on January 8, 1815, all needlessly because no one was aware that England and America had signed a treaty of peace in Belgium more than two weeks before. Even Washington did not hear of the treaty until February 13th. Meanwhile, all through January the capital and the East waited in anxiety to hear what had become of the great British force which had been sent to the Gulf of Mexico. A regular mail arrived on January 21st. It had left New Orleans at daybreak on December 24th and did not even bring news of the fight of the night before, but told of the armies being at close grips. For two weeks more the East tortured itself with wild imaginings. New Orleans had fallen, the British fleet was on the eastern coast, New York, Washington and Baltimore will be next to fall! Not until February 4th was the capital thrown into a delirium of joy by the news of Jackson's great victory.

One week later a ship crept into New York harbor with news of the peace. An express carried it to Washington, and thence another presently set out for New Orleans. On March 6th, after nineteen days' hard riding, he drew rein before General Jackson's headquarters. In he rushed and his bag was opened—but to the astonishment of the general and everybody present, the solitary little letter that tumbled out was an old one of no consequence which the Secretary of War had written to Jackson some months before. In the hurry of dispatching at Washington, the courier had been given the wrong packet. The only proof he could furnish of the truth of the news which he announced verbally was an order which he bore from the Postmaster-General requiring postal employees along the route to give him every possible facility for the forwarding of his important message.

In 1813 mails were carried on steamboats for the first time. In 1818 there was a great spurt of boat building on

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western rivers; and by 1819 there were sixty boats plying between Louisville and New Orleans, as well as dozens more between Pittsburgh and Louisville, the "falls" or rapids at the latter town dividing the traffic into two zones. Mail service was begun that year on the boats between Louisville and New Orleans. Six days were required for the downward trip, and fifteen for the return. It was now discovered that steamboat captains and clerks, like ship captains, had a penchant for doing a private mail business of their own.

In 1805 mail was being brought occasionally to Fort Dearborn, at the foot of Lake Michigan, by soldiers on foot from Fort Wayne, the nearest post office. In the early twenties the first regular express began operating between those points once a month; and a little later the garrison at irregular intervals exchanged mail with Fort Clarke (Peoria). The commandant of every frontier fort was in effect a postmaster. Whenever he made up a bag of mail for another army post—comprising a few official dispatches, news of the latest moves of the British and Indians and friendly letters between officers and privates who happened to know each other—the settlers around the fort would put in their letters, too, some (as were many of the soldiers' missives) directed to friends and kinsmen back East; and from one fort to another such letters would be passed along until they were—if not lost in transit—finally put into the hands of the regular mail service.

In 1826 when David McKee was carrying the mail on horseback between Fort Wayne and Fort Dearborn (or Chicago, as it now began to be called) Alexis Clermont was the courier between Chicago and Green Bay. Clermont went on foot and always took an Oneida Indian chum with him, making a round trip in a month. Only a few years before his time, the Wisconsin army posts had received mail only twice a year.

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The commandant at Fort Dearborn handled Chicago's mail until 1831 when the first government post office was established. Postmaster Jonathan Bailey had his office in a log house built by John Kinzie, one of the first settlers. Mail was at first sent to Fort Wayne or Niles, Michigan, as opportunity offered. During the severe winter of 1831-1832, a wiry half-breed made a round trip on foot to Niles, ninety miles distant, with the letter bag every two weeks. The first steamer reached Chicago via Michilimackinac in 1832. It is recorded that the post office receipts for that year were forty-seven dollars.

During the same year a new postmaster, Hogan, was appointed. He inaugurated a weekly service to Niles and put in a private box system—a row of old boots nailed against the wall, each bearing the name of some large receiver of letters. In 1833 there was a wagon mail from Detroit to Chicago, and Charles F. Hoffman, author of *A Winter in the West*, found traveling thereby not so bad. His own horse broke down at White Pigeon, and he writes from Door Prairie, Indiana, on December 29th:

Being now on the mail route between Detroit and Chicago, I am travelling very comfortably in a four-horse wagon . . . certainly the most agreeable mode of travelling at this season through a bleak prairie.

Postmaster Hogan was also distinguished for having begun the free delivery system. All mail which was not called for as soon as the rider came in, he sorted, put into his tall hat and went out to deliver. A goodly portion of it would be for the garrison at the fort, but there and elsewhere, whenever he stopped to deliver a letter, he stayed to give and receive news. It was during Hogan's incumbency that the editor of the *Democrat* became "furiously enraged at the mail carrier, who, after a week's absence, returned to town with the very mail he had taken away."



From Director Postal Service, Iceland

A RURAL MAIL TRAIN IN ICELAND
 Ponies carry the mail in wooden boxes



Harry A. Franck

ARRIVAL OF THE MAIL AT A VILLAGE POST OFFICE IN PERU

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After "the Boone's Lick Country" had become the property of the United States, St. Louis was supposed to receive its mail weekly; but the village was frequently exasperated by delays and by hearing reports that its letters were accumulating in quantities at Louisville or Vincennes. During the winter of 1809 the posts were particularly bad; mail came only every two or three weeks, and once nine weeks passed without a carrier. In 1812 the Grand Jury condemned the mail service as a nuisance. The *Missouri Gazette* in January, 1820, announced:

It is reported that Mr. Lindsley, Agent for the Post-Office Department, had to-day started four or five bushels of mail to St. Louis by special contract.

By 1825 stagecoaches were running to and through the Missouri metropolis, and it was receiving its eastern mail twice a week, "to-wit; every Wednesday by the Shawneetown route and every Sunday by the Vincennes route." Beyond the Mississippi the mail carrier was pushing, close behind the settler's covered wagon, into the western wilds. Little Rock began receiving mail in 1821, and within five years it was only a way station. Up the Mississippi by 1825-1826 the post was traveling once a month to Hannibal, Rock Island and Prairie du Chien. Detroit meanwhile had thrown out lines to Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids and even to Michilimackinac.

Volumes might be written on the hardihood, the adventures and sufferings of these frontier mail carriers; menaced by hostile Indians, exposed to every sort of storm—and with no semblance of waterproof clothing—wading and swimming swollen or icy streams, toiling over crags and through snow-drifts, through swamps and thickets which tore skin and clothing like knives, often compelled to sleep out at night in the bitterest of weather. Frozen feet were a common ailment, and many lost toes thereby. Snow blindness was

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another misfortune, suffered particularly by those on foot, and which sometimes completely halted a carrier midway on his route. A gun was a part of a courier's equipment, not so much for protection as to kill game for his eating en route. Some depended to a certain extent on friendly Indians along the line, but occasionally the Indians removed their villages, and when all other food failed, the postman fell back on parched corn, of which he always carried at least a shot bag full. If the grazing was not good, it is said that riders would cut down an elm or basswood sapling for the horse to nibble on.

A typical experience was that of a boy not yet twenty who rode a post route in Ohio. Coming to a swollen stream, he swam across, leading his horse by the bridle. In the middle of the stream the mail bag became detached from the saddle and floated away. Reaching the bank, the boy hastily tethered his horse and ran down stream, stumbling over rocks and crashing through brush, and finally plunged in to rescue the bag. But the river was full of débris, and a floating log struck him such a heavy blow on the head that he barely reached the shore, dazed and half drowned. After a time he managed to get to his horse and by a superhuman effort, crawl into the saddle. The horse found its own way to the next village, where the rider was taken from the saddle, more dead than alive, and lay ill for weeks before he could take up his duties again.

In the latter twenties the mail was being carried from Detroit to Ann Arbor by a fifteen-year-old boy. A few years later settlers were pushing westward towards Lake Michigan, and many were locating along Grand River. A little Indian trading post formed the nucleus of a village at first called Grab Corners and later Grand Rapids. In 1834 Benjamin Fox had the contract for carrying the mail to that place from Detroit, and in connection with his line

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there is told one of the most strikingly significant pioneer narratives to be found in all our annals.

The road—or rather, course, for there was no road—through wood and swamp towards Grand Rapids was so dreadful that Fox could not keep riders on the job. They were always hours or days late in arriving, and generally quit after the first trip. Finally Fox's nephew, Augustus, a boy of seventeen, just come out from York State, asked to be given a chance at the problem. He was evidently no ordinary youth. He studied a crude map of the country, and when he started on his first trip, he made some short cuts from the former course, blazing a tree now and then with a hatchet which he carried in his belt. Brush and thorns tore at him, and at one place he fell into a swamp from which he escaped only with great difficulty. Reaching the settlement of Okemos, he sought out a settler named Ingersoll.

"Are you the postmaster?" he asked.

"Yes, bub," was the reply, "but I never get any mail; leastways, I haven't had any yet."

"Well, here's your first," said the boy, handing him two letters.

Thence the carrier rode on towards Flat River. As he neared a cabin in a little clearing, he heard moans and cries of "Help! Oh, help me!" in a woman's voice. Dismounting and running into the cabin, he found a woman in travail. Her husband had gone eight miles for a doctor, but the crisis had come upon her before he had time to return.

"What'll I do?" asked the boy. "I don't know nothin' about doctorin'."

"Just do what I tell you," said the woman; and the awkward, embarrassed youth set his teeth and met the occasion with the indomitable spirit of the American pioneer. When the child was born and he had done all that seemed immediately necessary, he mounted his horse and rode on.

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At Grand Rapids he was given an enthusiastic reception and entertained free of charge. But stern duty did not permit him to tarry long, and he started eastward again next day. As he neared the cabin near Flat River, a tall, whiskered man rushed out excitedly.

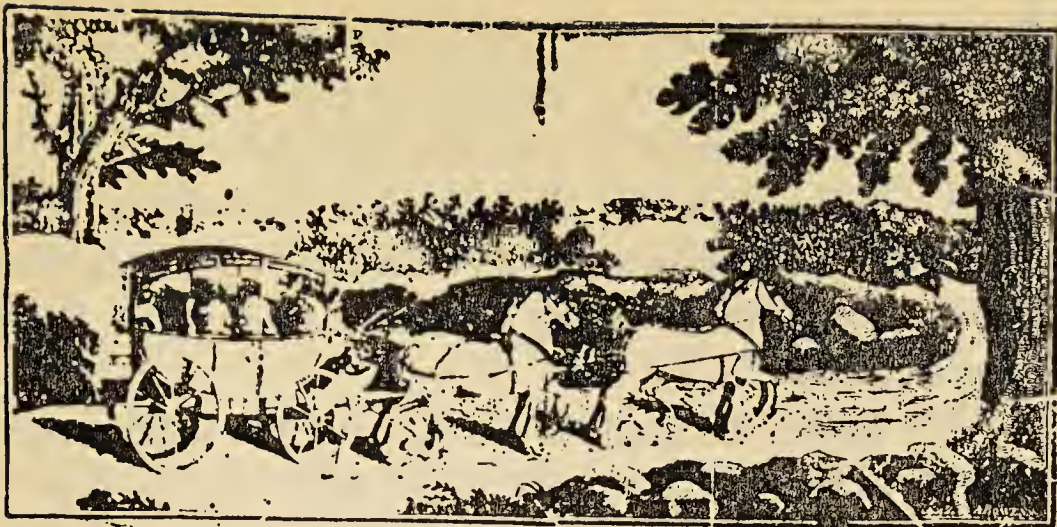
"Say!" he demanded. "Are you the feller that was here the other day?"

"Yes."

"Well, by gosh, I'm glad to see you! That baby boy and his mother are doin' just fine. I bet a dollar you can't guess what we named him. You see, we didn't know your name, and might never see you again, so we just called the little feller 'Mail Boy.' Come in and see him!"

At Detroit Augustus was greeted by Governor Mason, General Lewis Cass and others who had been awaiting him anxiously, although he arrived four hours ahead of scheduled time. The governor immediately called attention to the tattered condition of the boy's clothes after his arduous ride, and took up a collection of twenty-five dollars on the sidewalk to buy him a new suit—privately adding twelve dollars from his own pocket. Thereafter the Grand Rapids mail ran more regularly.

By 1822 mail was traveling from Washington to Nashville, the time under best conditions being eleven days. But here as well as elsewhere it was observed that roads after being used for a while, became worse than when first opened. By 1824 the greater part of this road was reported to be "uniformly bad." There were still plenty of people to be found, however, who contended that it was an extravagance to build macadamized turnpikes. Pennsylvania completed one from Philadelphia to Lancaster in 1804; a few years later it reached Harrisburg, and in 1819 Pittsburgh, being the first of the kind to cross the Alleghenies. Some of the citizens of Pennsylvania groaned at the expense. "Our roads are far too expensive; they are extravagant," wrote



NEW LINE OF STAGES.

Winter Establishment.

This Line will commence running on the 16th inst. from Providence to Worcester, through Smithfield and Uxbridge, twice a week, Viz:

LEAVES Providence Tuesdays and Fridays, at 7 o'clock, A. M. and arrives in Worcester same Evenings.....**R**ETURNING.....Leaves Worcester Wednesdays and Saturdays, and arrives in Providence the same Evenings.

N. B. This Line will connect with the Keene, New-Hampshire, Mail Coaches, leaving Worcester on Wednesdays at the same place.

Books kept at Wesson's, Providence, R. I. at Farnham's, Smithfield, Slatersville, and at How and White's, Worcester, Mass.

FARE THREE DOLLARS.....CUSTOMARY WEIGHT OF BAGGAGE ALLOWED.

**A. WESSON & SONS.
JOB N. TUTTLE.**

Providence, Oct. 9, 1821.

PRINTED BY GREEN AND WELLS, PRINTERS, BOSTON.

A NEW ENGLAND MAIL STAGE POSTER, 1821

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a Pennsylvanian who was traveling in central New York in 1810. "The Newyork turnpikes, like those of Newengland, are made merely by clearing out the stumps, ditching on each side the road and elevating it in the middle by means of the dirt thrown out of the ditches. This enables the people to complete so many more of them than there are in Pennsylvania."

But the fallacy of earthen roads, with the little care which communities were able to give them then, was proven in the years that followed, and particularly during the War of 1812, of which period it was afterwards asserted that enough money had been wasted during the war for lack of military roads and canals to turnpike the whole western country. During that time the road along the lake shore from Buffalo through Cleveland to Detroit enjoyed the dubious distinction of being probably the worst in the world. Mail was supposed to be carried from Buffalo to Cleveland in a week, but it might take two or three times that long. Even as late as 1837 it was said at Cleveland that "the land mail between here and Detroit crawls at a snail's pace." The rich, deep, gluey soil of the middle-western plains was simply impossible as a road surface. In 1825 the Postmaster-General reported that the mails on a certain route in Ohio often weighed fifteen hundred pounds, and the contractor was compelled to use four horses to a cart and refuse passengers, for the wheels frequently sank in mud up to the axles. A Columbus newspaper in 1838 said, "Six horses were barely able to draw the two-wheeled vehicle fifteen miles in three days." By that time there were post routes all over Ohio. Hundreds of miles of canal had been built, and their boats were carrying some of the mail. Indiana, Illinois and Michigan were likewise receiving many new mail routes, but the difficulties were beyond conception. Wheeled vehicles were often actually abandoned for a time in quagmires or snowdrifts, and the mail either left in them, or at best a portion

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of it was dragged on in canvas-covered crates or on sledges.

But presently the roads began to improve in the more heavily traveled stretches, and in 1842 Dickens found good macadam between Cincinnati and Columbus; while in 1834 Miss Martineau traveled on three pikes running out of Nashville as well as some in Kentucky, where she claimed that you might have done sketching while riding on a coach at a rapid rate. Would that we had some of the sort now! Even before the roads were bettered, the stagecoach began to penetrate the wilderness and supplant the postrider, mail cart and sulky. In 1822 mail was carried "by direct or corresponding stage lines," from Saint Marys, Georgia, to Highgate, Vermont, 1,369 miles; while in 1824 the "great western mail" was being carried by stage from Washington to Franklin, Missouri. Nevertheless, in 1825 the Postmaster-General still found it true that "the intelligence of more than half the Nation is conveyed on horseback."

The leather bag or portmanteau was the mail receptacle usually carried by riders and stagecoaches in the East. Saddlebags were used on some unimportant lines, but as newspapers and larger packets began to come in quantity, the larger portmanteau was found necessary. When deposited in the boot of a stagecoach, a strap or chain was run through the handles of the several bags and locked. Pickering, in giving instructions to a contractor for the design of the portmanteau, says that "staples should be placed so near together that a small hand cannot be thrust in between them." The postmasters en route had keys to the portmanteau lock and opened it to take out their own mail.

The problem of keeping the mail dry also gave no little trouble. Bags of oiled linen and deerskin were tried; and the form of contract in use in 1826 specified that when the mail was carried on horseback, "it shall be covered securely with oil cloth or bearskin against rain or snow, under a penalty of \$20 for each time the mail is wet without such

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covering." The mails mentioned between Green Bay and Chicago, and some other frontier routes as well, were carried in a sort of flattish canister or tin box, covered with untanned deer hide.

A rule of the department was that "when mail goes by a stage wagon it shall invariably be carried within the body of it; and that when it stops at night it shall be put in a secure place and there locked up." A penalty of a dollar a mile was threatened for carrying mail outside the body of the coach. Robberies of the mail became rather frequent in the early part of the century, especially in the South; but some of the most startling cases were on the highway between Washington and New York. Often the thieves merely sneaked behind the vehicle at a stop, cut into the leather boot, and either abstracted a portmanteau, or if it was too securely chained, cut it open.

The thieves were frequently fooled. One night in 1822 the portmanteau containing the "great eastern mail" was cut open, "but it seems probable," said a newspaper account, "that the rogue missed his object, as the letters lost are ascertained to have been single." That is, there were no enclosures—no money, checks, drafts or bonds. But the worst flabbergasted robbers on record were those who cut the straps in the rear boot of the Southern Mail coach about one o'clock one morning in 1825 below New Brunswick, New Jersey, and stole two large bags full of nothing but newspapers. They did not know that the letter mail was carried in the front boot, under the driver's feet, where it could not be so easily got at. A poet of the day humorously pictures their horror when they paused in a thicket to open the bags and examine their booty:

Now strike your light. Ye powers that look upon us!
What have we here? Whigs, Sentinels, Gazettes,
Heralds and Posts and couriers; Mercuries,

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Recorders, Advertisers and Intelligencers——

Advocates and Auroras.——There, what's that?

That's—— a Price Current!

But the hold-up was frequently the method in the case of a solitary carrier, and tragedy sometimes resulted. A particularly heinous case was the robbery and murder between Philadelphia and Baltimore in March, 1820, of the mail carrier who was traveling alone; for a light-wheeled vehicle or sleigh was often used in the winter months, and no passengers accepted. But stagecoaches were actually held up, as in June, 1830, when a driver was shot from ambush in the outskirts of Baltimore and the mail robbed. There was not as much robbery in the western wilderness as might be expected, but it did sometimes occur. In 1810 the rider between Vincennes and Kaskaskia was waylaid and slain while defending his trust, and the government offered five thousand dollars reward for the apprehension of his murderers.

The penalties for mail robbery were heavy in those days. From 1792 to 1799 any theft of valuable letters was punishable by death; from 1799 to 1810 only by whipping; but "aggravated mail robbery," if the court so described it, might be punished by death as late as 1872.

Stagecoaches were considered safer for mail transportation than the solitary rider, it being argued that the presence of the passengers would deter robbers from open attacks, which was true. No robber of that early day ever summoned up sufficient nerve to hold the entire crew and passengers of a coach in awe at the point of his gun as certain lone freebooters of the Far West did in later years.

The writer has already expressed in another work the opinion that the early decades of the nineteenth century presented the most marvelous picture of progress in American history. The growth of the Post Office in the first forty years of our present government is a bit of evidence offered in support of this belief. In 1789 we had, all told, seventy-

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five post offices and 1,875 miles of post lines. In 1829 we had over eight thousand post offices (more than one hundred and six times as many as when Washington took the oath of office, only forty years before) and 114,780 miles of mail lines. To glance at only a section of the country, the wilderness of Ohio had not a post office nor a mile of post line in 1789; in 1828 the new state had 536 offices. In 1789 the Susquehanna River might have been called the western boundary of the mail service. In 1829 its tentacles were already hundreds of miles beyond the Mississippi, and pushing across the plains towards the Rocky Mountains.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD

When a railroad is constructed through a district of country, competition in the conveyance of passengers, mails and merchandise ceases on the route.

. . . Demand is immediately made for the mails.

POSTMASTER-GENERAL MONTGOMERY BLAIR, 1861.

IN 1800 the rural postman in the East was still of the old, leisurely, pre-Revolutionary type. Though he was in intent a "star route" carrier, designed to supply country post offices with their mail, yet he still made local deliveries to individuals. James Rees, in *Footprints of a Letter-Carrier*, thus draws a picture of him from memory:

A tall, gaunt man sat on a tall, gaunt horse; he came riding slowly up the road; his hair was partly gray and fell in tow-looking ringlets down and around his long, sinewy neck. Over the horse's back was swung a large, well-filled pair of saddle bags. He was the post rider. He had started from the main post of the county in Norristown to others in directions diverging from the main road. He stopped his horse, and raising his tall form, resting his feet on a pair of old, rusty stirrups, he shouted out in a voice of mimic thunder, "Look here, Jim; take this letter to your mother, 'mediate; for that is written on the back; and as you pass Mrs. Stroud's, hand her this newspaper. Do this, Jim, and I'll give you a sixpence next pay-day."

But the century was still young when demands for greater speed became insistent. From 1800 to the present time the cry in America has been, "Faster! Faster!" More than a century ago commerce and government were already find-

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ing the mails too slow for their needs, and were employing special messengers. New York and Philadelphia newspapers maintained express riders from Washington who far outran the posts. Merchants and brokers in the same manner secured advance market information which enabled them to turn many a speculative trick on the outsider who did not learn the news until the mail came boggling along.

This became a serious matter with the rise of New Orleans as a cotton market, and in 1825 Postmaster-General McLean sought to correct the condition by installing Express Mail service between the larger cities, often referred to as the first Pony Express. Relays of horses were stationed twelve or fifteen miles apart, and by charging triple postage the bag was limited to a few letters and some printed slips exchanged by newspapers, thus making it possible, when all other conditions were right, for the rider to gallop along at eight or ten miles an hour. This was hailed by the cities as the beginning of a new era. When the time from New York to New Orleans was (theoretically) lowered from sixteen days to seven, the flag on the New York Merchants' Exchange was hoisted in celebration of the event.

There were, as always, a few pessimists who doubted the value of news dispatched in such haste. They feared that "the express would be bearers of imperfect accounts of the state of foreign markets and thus prove messengers of darkness and mischief, instead of heralds of light and promoters of fair trade." On the contrary, the express proved a great public service; and it is due to the profound impression which it created that the Post Office Department a few years later changed the design of its seal from that of the Mercury borne through the clouds to the galloping postrider as it is to-day.

The stagecoaches, too, improved their speed and regularity—in good weather. An enthusiastic writer in the *Port-*

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folio would have us believe that they had attained a clock-like regularity:

Behold yon group of eager politicians waiting the arrival of the mail. How frequently they inquire the time! A minute has elapsed since it should have arrived and their impatience has become ungovernable.

In contrast to the above, one is somewhat disconcerted to come across a traveler's * account of his mail-coach journey through New England:

Our progress was much delayed by the delivery of the mail bag at every small hamlet on the road. The letters in America, instead of being put into separate bags for each town as in England, are carried in one huge leather case, which the postmaster is allowed to detain ten minutes, so that he may pick his letters out of the general mass. The coachman (there being no guard) drives up to the office, sometimes a small tavern, and throws the bag, about the size of a flour sack, upon the hard pavement or muddy road, as most convenient; it is then trailed along into the house and, being unlocked, the lower end is elevated and out tumble all the letters, newspapers and pamphlets upon the floor. At the little village of Lenox I had the curiosity to look into the bar for the purpose of seeing the mode of sorting letters, and witnessed a scene which could never answer in any other country. The sorters consisted of an old, gray-headed man at least 75 years of age, an old woman "with spectacles on nose," the old gentleman's equal in point of years, and a great fat, ruddy-faced damsel of twenty-five, backed by half a dozen dirty little barefooted urchins, who were all down upon their knees on the floor, overhauling the huge pile before them, flinging those letters which were for their office into a distant corner of the room, amongst sundry wet mops, brushes, molasses barrels, etc.; and those which were for other towns on our route were again bagged in the same gentle style, part having to undergo

* E. T. Coke, *A Subaltern's Furlough*, 1833.

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the same process every fifth mile of our day's journey, excepting at the post-office of Onondaga Hill, where the post master being an attorney at law, managed to detain us only two minutes. Many of these offices, costing the Government an annual sum of 200 or 300 dollars for the post master's salary, do not receive one-half that amount in letters. One man assured me that sometimes his month's receipts did not exceed six dollars.

Between New York and Washington and in Pennsylvania, where there were many competing lines, rivalry and speed ran high. The vaunt of a coach proprietor over a rival in an Easton, Pennsylvania, newspaper in 1829 indicates that he must have induced the postmasters along his route to hasten their examinations of the mail bag:

COMMUNICATION

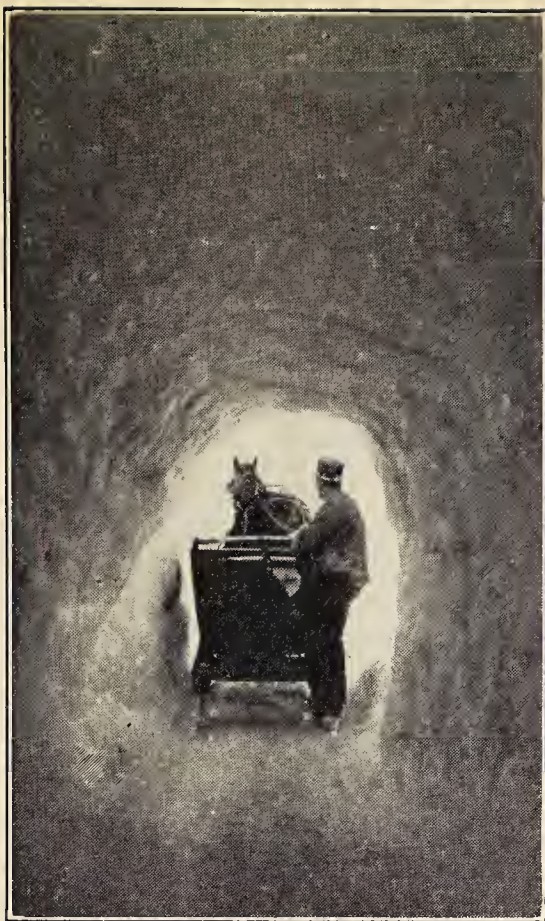
The Easton Mail State left Philadelphia at 5 o'clock A.M. and arrived at Easton 30 minutes after 1 o'clock P.M., and on the same day left Easton at 5 o'clock A.M. and arrived in the city of Philadelphia 45 minutes after 12 o'clock, besides changing the mail at 20 different post offices going and coming.

 *Smoke that, neighbor Spriggins!*

EASTON, June 16, 1829.

W. WHITE,
Proprietor

In 1831 a mail coach leaving New York at 3 P.M. went through to Philadelphia in eight hours and forty-two minutes, carrying eight people (including the driver) and baggage and mails estimated to weigh twenty-five hundred pounds. "This is smart traveling," was a contemporary comment. This run was in reality only from Paulus Hook in Jersey City to Philadelphia. A messenger from the New York post office carried the mails between the Hook and the city, rowing across the Hudson in a skiff. It is said that in 1800 the entire southern mail could be put in one small bag which the man carried in his hand; but by 1825 it was necessary



From Swiss Post Office Department

TUNNEL FOR MAIL SLED
THROUGH HUGE SNOWDRIFT IN
THE ALPS



From Swiss Post Office Department

RURAL POSTMAN, SWITZERLAND,
IN WINTER



From Swiss Post Office Department

FIVE-HORSE MAIL DILIGENCE, CANTON OF GRISONS, SWITZERLAND,
1924

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to have a wheelbarrow to haul the bags between the Battery and the post office in Garden Street.

The fast run mentioned above was made by one of Colonel Reeside's crack Southern Mail coaches. Reeside was then the leading stage proprietor of the country. For several years prior to 1825 he had carried the mails between New York and Washington, and that year he secured the contract between New York and Boston. His "elegant" coaches were drawn by four fine Virginia horses, and the reins were handled by skillful but daring drivers. On pleasant afternoons, New Yorkers with time on their hands would walk up the Bowery Road just to see his Boston Mail come in. As he neared the old hay scales, near where Cooper Union now stands, the driver would wind his horn, crack his whip and come dashing down the Bowery into town at a glorious pace. High speed of course brought about accidents. Upsets were not uncommon. I. Daniel Rupp, a satirical old chronicler of Pennsylvania, remarks that "there are two daily lines of stages from Philadelphia (to Pottsville)—Reeside against Coleman—and they merit an eulogium for the vigor with which they crack their whips, the matchless fury of their driving and their exquisite skill in upsetting." A writer describing Pennsylvania scenes in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* in 1840 points out that

the smiling village you see six miles to the south is Schuylkill Haven; and the vehicle upon the road, its four wheels in air and the passengers making their toilet by the way-side—the women gathering up the babies they had thrown out of the window—is the mail-stage, upset.

There were occasionally even worse accidents; two racing coaches, for example, locked wheels and wrecked each other in a dreadful smash-up, sacrificing both life and limb. Perhaps in some such disaster perished the man whose tomb in a New Jersey churchyard bore the epitaph:

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Weep, stranger, for a father spilled
From a stage coach and thereby killed.
John Sykes was his name, a maker of sassenagers,
Slain with three other outside passengers.

The eastern service was much complimented during the winter of 1828-1829. Notwithstanding severe weather, there was not a failure of the mail between Philadelphia and Baltimore, and other routes presented nearly as good a record, though one stage driver froze to death on the box during a storm between Philadelphia and New York.

In December, 1834, a privately owned express line carried the President's message from Washington to Baltimore in one hour and forty-six minutes. Four minutes after its arrival there, at 2:10 P.M., another rider sped away northward with it and reached Philadelphia, one hundred miles distant, at 7:58. Time from Washington to Philadelphia, seven hours, thirty-two minutes. Proceeding eastward, the message was in New York at two o'clock next morning. The whole distance was two hundred and thirty-five miles or more, the roads were heavy, and yet the trip had been made in thirteen hours and forty minutes, which, for horseback carrying, one must admit is pretty good.

But the government mail service fell into much disrepute during Jackson's administration, under Barry and Kendall. There was much lamentation for the loss of the efficient Postmaster-General McLean, who had left office at the beginning of Jackson's first term, in protest against Old Hickory's determination to remove hundreds of postal employees and supplant them with his own partisans. Now it was declared that villages within a few miles of the larger cities often waited a week for their mail. Even in May, 1835, with the weather favorable, *Niles's Register* said, "We have had two failures of the mail east of Philadelphia in the

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present week. Those from the South and West are quite as irregular."

In the winter of 1836-1837 conditions were much worse. On January 16th Niles said,

The mails were never in a worse state than they have been for some time past. On Tuesday a great mass of mail matter arrived, yet there were two mails still due from New York and beyond. . . . The present apology seems to be a snow storm that happened eastward of Baltimore on Sunday last—but the business of the Post-Office has been badly damaged for a month or more.

At the same time Philadelphia was raging because it had had no mail from the East for several days. One week it was noted that letters which left New York on Saturday at 2 P.M. had not yet reached Philadelphia on Wednesday night. It was even related that some letters from New York had, after weeks of delay, reached Philadelphia by way of New Orleans.

We had much better be without a mail service altogether [asserted the *Inquirer*] than be deceived and disappointed. The roads, we know, are bad and some allowance must be made, but we must also remind our readers that despite the snow storm, little or no delay has been experienced on the railroads, which could, as heretofore, have been at the service of the Postmaster.

That same month the *Missouri Republican* announces that "the mails are now ten days behind the time"; while a Cincinnati paper called attention to the fact that an "oyster line" brought oysters through from Baltimore in five days, whereas the mails took eight days. And a Chicago newspaper carried this satirical item:

HIGHLY IMPORTANT.—By a foot passenger from the South we learn that the long expected mail may be looked for in a week.

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The Philadelphia reference to the railroads was significant. Mail had been first carried on the Camden & Amboy and Saratoga & Schenectady Railroads in 1832—and, by the way, the last-named road's compensation for the service was four dollars a day. The road between Frenchtown, Maryland, and Newcastle, Delaware, was also a very early carrier. But the Camden & Amboy insisted upon much higher rates than the others, and its service was not always as good as the Philadelphia editor would have one believe. The *Baltimore American* in 1835 thus describes the vicissitudes of the mail in crossing New Jersey:

We learn from a gentleman who left New York with the mail for the South at 4 o'clock on Friday afternoon that its failure to arrive in Philadelphia in time for the Baltimore boat on Saturday morning was owing to the following causes: In the first place, the steamboat on the route from New York to Amboy was laden to the brim with merchandise, by which her trip to Amboy was prolonged, if we remember aright, to twice the time of an ordinary passage. At Amboy the passengers were detained about an hour and a half, until several carloads of merchandise were transferred from the steamboat to the cars. When the train reached the elevation in the cut about a mile or two from Amboy, the locomotive was unable to surmount it, and was compelled to return to a point where a part of the train could be detached. In the meantime a violent storm had arisen, and when the locomotive attempted a second time to pass the cut, its progress was impeded by the sand with which the rain washings had covered the rails. Here was another detention until implements could be sent for and the rails cleared. After getting under way the train proceeded about five miles further, when one of the merchandise cars got out of order and was finally thrown off the road, after being unladen of its contents. No other mishap occurred, but our informant states that when he reached Philadelphia after a fourteen hours' journey from New York, the Baltimore steamboat had left there an hour before.

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It was a question which mode of mail carriage was the more uncertain in those days. Harriet Martineau tells of being mired "ten times a day" in horse vehicles in the South. The driver carried an ax with which to cut saplings to be used as levers under the hubs. In Indiana, too, she was detained twenty-four hours in the "mail wagon" in the Kankakee swamps near La Porte by a broken bridge. Finally, a temporary bridge was rigged up, and they went on, hub-deep in water a part of the time, to Michigan City. But her railroad travel was likewise eventful; a locomotive boiler sprang a leak and stopped the train in the middle of a southern swamp; and there they lay all day, the male passengers whiling away the time by frog hunting.

There was a curious hodgepodge of conveyance in use in the thirties and forties. Dickens, for example, when he toured the country in 1842, traveled by railroad, steamboat, stagecoach and canal boat; and the mails used not only these four, but horse and foot messengers as well, sometimes several varieties on one short journey. Dickens, traveling with the mails from Washington to Richmond, went by steamboat down the Potomac to Potomac Creek. Thence a picturesque caravan—the mails heading the procession in a wagon, and seven coaches following with the passengers—carried them to Fredericksburg, where they took the railroad cars for Richmond. The novelist's amusing description of the stage ride over the frightful country road—"a series of swamps and gravel pits"—should make us profoundly thankful for these days of better transportation.

Dickens, in describing the coaches, "hung on bands of the strongest leather" instead of springs, says:

They are covered with mud from the roof to the wheel-tire, and have never been cleaned since they were first built. . . . The coach holds nine inside, having a seat across from door to door, where we in England put our legs; so that there is only one

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feat more difficult in the performance than getting in, and that is getting out again.

But on his return, after journeying by rail from Washington York, Pennsylvania, he was introduced to a larger coach:

There came rumbling up the street, shaking its sides like a corpulent giant, a kind of barge on wheels. . . .

"If here ain't the Harrisburg mail at last, and dreadful bright and smart to look at, too," cried an elderly gentleman in some excitement, "darn my mother!"

The Harrisburg Mail carried twelve people inside, "and the luggage (including such trifles as a large rocking-chair and a good-sized dining-table)" was made fast on the roof. From Harrisburg the traveler took a canal boat for Pittsburgh. For many years the Allegheny Mountains stood as a barrier to railroad building across Pennsylvania. Not until 1857 was a track completed from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh; and meanwhile the mails had been traveling in stages and on horseback. A company signed a contract in the thirties to run two daily lines between two cities, carrying letter mail through in sixty hours and newspaper bags in eighty-five hours, which was rather "smart travelling" with several hundred pounds' weight over more than three hundred and fifty miles of hilly road.

In the Middle West the canals carried the mails in some sections until the railroads came; for the three or four miles per hour speed of the packet boats was about as good as the stages could make over some of the bottomless roads. The *Miami County Sentinel*, of Peru, Indiana, is found complaining in the early fifties that the poor, dying old Wabash & Erie Canal "is keeping up its reputation as an intolerable bore and a nuisance," because the packets so frequently carried Peru's mail—especially the newspapers—by the town, returning it only the next day or the day after that.

The Coming of the Railroad

It was a bit difficult to make postal arrangements with some of the early railroads because they would consent to run trains only in daylight. A typical case was that of the line between Charleston and Hamburg, South Carolina. The president of the road, R. T. Hayne, positively refused to agree to his train's being scheduled to reach its destination after 4:30 P.M. for the reason that it might now and then be late, and "the safety of our passengers forbids our running in the dark." He was willing to do anything, he said, to coöperate with the Post Office Department, but he could not agree "to do what could not be effected without frequently running in the night, which our duty to the public will not permit."

The Camden & Amboy Railroad, having practically got control of the New Jersey Legislature, began feeling its oats a bit, and at first demanded one hundred dollars per mile for carrying the mail, shortly afterwards raising this to three hundred dollars. The Postmaster-General indignantly refused to pay such a rate, and for a long time used the stages. But as the railroads increased their efficiency, they realized that they had Uncle Sam at their mercy. In 1832 their speed was only ten or twelve miles per hour, barely holding them even with the stagecoaches; but a few years later, when the Wilmington & Susquehanna was opened, the first train was reported to have attained at times a speed of twenty miles an hour. A dazed editor, calculating the reductions in time which this speed would effect, asked, "Are we in a dream?"

Plainly, the railroad magnates were not dreaming, but wide awake and sensible of their opportunity. Some public men had foreseen very early the long-drawn-out conflict now brewing. De Witt Clinton had urged that the United States secure an interest in all railroads, or at least, the power to control them, lest the carriage of the mails be hindered. Some favored the government's building all the

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railroads. Jackson's message of 1831 hinted at the danger, and in 1835 he said: "Already does the spirit of monopoly begin to exhibit its natural propensities in attempts to extract from the public . . . the most extravagant compensation." He doubted whether a corporation had the legal power to exclude the United States from "the established channels of communication," and he questioned whether the government might not force the railroads to give transportation to the mails. He also suggested that the amount to be paid for the carriage of the mails be fixed by law.

The navigable rivers of the country had all been declared post roads in 1823, and now that distinction was also applied to railroads; this not only to shut off private carrying of letters over them, but likewise to give Congress that power over them which many believed had been conferred by the Constitutional clause upon post roads. Postmaster-General Kendall said in his report for 1835:

If wheels can be constructed which can be used alike upon the railroads and the streets of the cities, the Department will furnish an entire car containing the mail to be delivered at the depot and received at the other, asking nothing of the company but to haul it.

But this didn't suit the railroads. Kendall then suggested that the government put its own locomotives and postal cars upon the roads. This likewise was received with derisive laughter. The department chief then hinted that the government might do it despite the company's objection. But interference with private rights was so greatly abhorred at that time that both the administration and Congress shrank from any move towards coercion, which only made the railroads the more arrogant.

In 1837 one finds the Postmaster-General offering the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad a lump sum of \$20,000 per annum for carrying the mails between Balti-

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more and Philadelphia. The offer was rejected, and after some further negotiation, the department agreed to pay \$27,500. The president of the road offered to give the government a franchise for free carriage of the mails forever, provided that the United States would buy \$1,000,000 worth of stock in the company. It would have been a good investment, but the administration doubted its right to make such a deal.

It was in the following year that the first American railway post office was put into service. In our postal annals, George B. Armstrong is frequently credited with having originated, during the Civil War, the idea of sorting mail on trains, though it is true that another man did it two years before Armstrong had opportunity to put his scheme into effect. But as a matter of fact, the railway mail car was in use in both England and America many years before Armstrong's beginning. The first "sorting car" was operated in England in 1837, and by 1840 nets were even being used at the sides of their cars to catch mail at the stations, for trains there were running sometimes thirty miles an hour. America took up the idea quickly, and in 1838 a "travelling agent" was appointed by the Post Office Department to operate between New York and Philadelphia. *Niles's Register* said on May 19, 1838:

Mail cars constructed under the direction of the post office department are now running on the railroads between Washington and Philadelphia. They contain two apartments; one appropriated to the use of the great mails and the other to the way mails; and a post-office agent. The latter apartment is fitted up with boxes, labelled with the names of all the small offices on or near the railroad lines. It has also a letter box in front, into which letters may be put up to the moment of starting the cars, and anywhere on the road.

The agent of the post-office department attends the mail from the post-offices at the ends of the route, and sees it safely de-

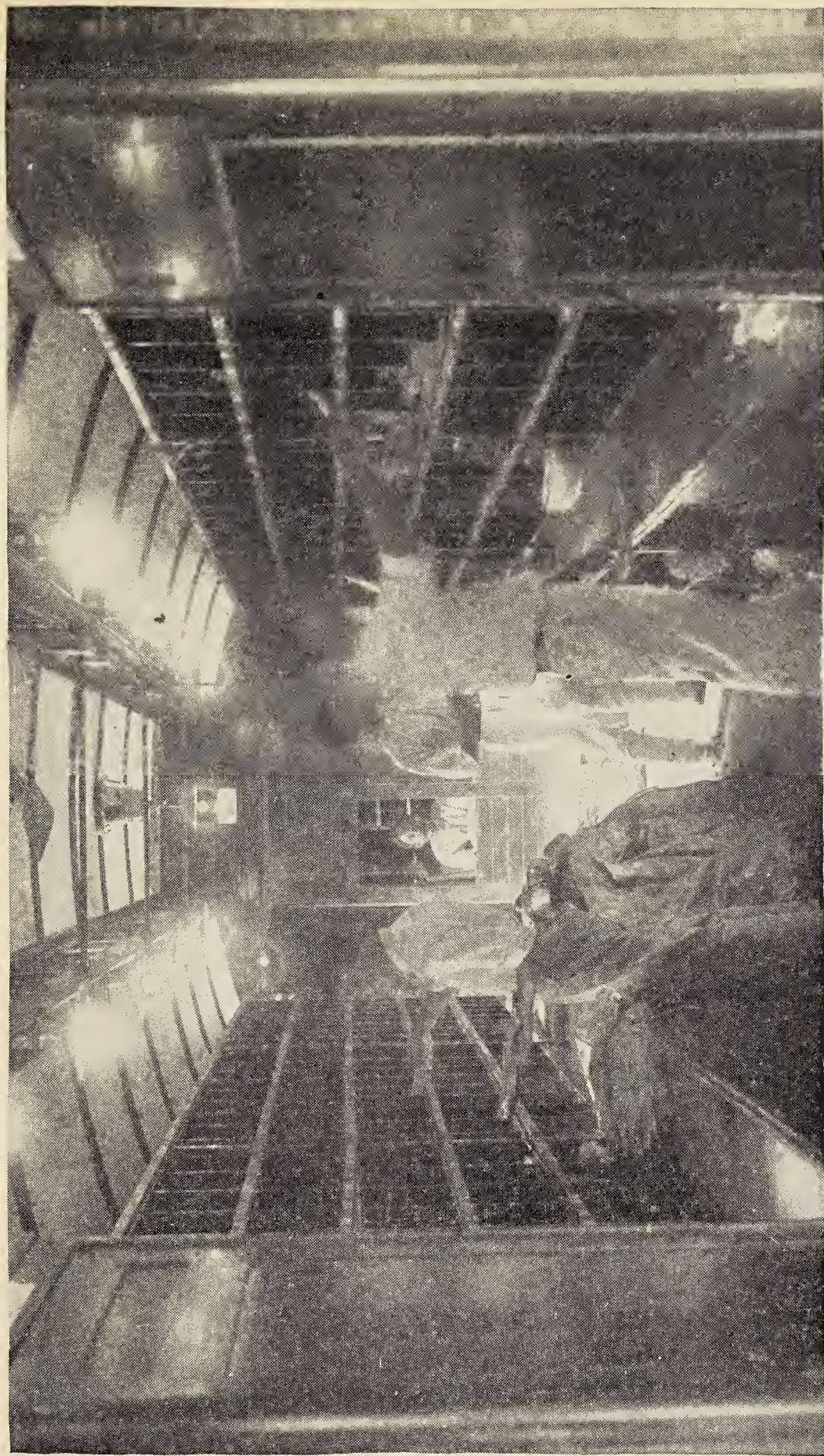
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posited in his car. As soon as the cars start, he opens the letter-box and takes out all the letters, marking them so as to designate the place where they are put in. He then opens the way mail bag and distributes its contents into the several boxes. As the cars approach a post-office, the agent takes out the contents of the proper box and puts them into a pouch. The engineer slackens the speed of the train and the agent hands the pouch to the postmaster or a carrier who stands beside the track to take it, receiving from him at the same time another pouch with the matter to be sent from that office. . . .

Well executed, the plan must be almost the perfection of mail arrangements. It is intended, when it can be conveniently done, to extend it through to New York.

Early in 1840 a clerk was put on the train between Worcester and Norwich, Connecticut, to sort the mails passing between New York and Boston; and in June of that year two agents were ordered to accompany the mails between Boston and Springfield. The duties of these agents were mostly local, but it appears that they must have done some sorting of the through mail. Why no one for more than twenty years ever thought of applying the principle to the "great mails" in general it is difficult to understand.

The career of the sorting cars between Philadelphia and Washington was interrupted within a year, when the railroad demanded three hundred dollars a mile for carrying the mail. The Postmaster-General, after some debate, agreed to pay that amount if they would haul two mails a day each way instead of one, as they had been doing. The officials replied that they would carry no more than one mail at such a figure, and that only at hours most convenient to them. For two mails a day they must have five hundred dollars a mile. Kendall, in commenting upon this outrageous demand, pointed out that "they are under no necessity to change their hours, to run in the night, to cross the Susquehanna in the



From Official Tourist Bureau, Batavia, Java

A MODERN RAILWAY POSTAL CAR, MANNED BY NATIVE CLERKS, IN JAVA

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dark or to do anything whatever which brings them loss, danger or inconvenience."

Mr. Kendall now bethought himself of a subterfuge. Secretly he chose special messengers who were to travel as passengers on the trains on which there was no mail service, and carry trunks filled up to the limit permitted by the company's baggage rules with mail matter. But the railroad presently detected this ruse, and actually went to the length in 1840 of seizing and detaining a messenger's trunk at Baltimore. They were quickly shown that such a high-handed procedure would not do; but they soon found other ways of dealing with the situation. Trunks could be "accidentally" delayed, for example. A compromise was finally effected, but again the government paid a higher rate. From that day to this the argument has raged. After a few decades the government obtained such control of the situation that the railroads appeared as the injured parties, complaining that they were handling the mails at cost, or even at an actual loss.

As fast as new railroads were built, their superiority over horse-drawn vehicles compelled the government to use them for the mails. As proving the fallacy of the earlier belief that the mail could be regularly carried from New York to New Orleans on horseback in seven days, in 1839, when most of the journey was performed by rail, the regular time was nine days. There were then "only 290 miles of staging" necessary on the route, *viz.*, 70 miles in North Carolina and 220 miles in Georgia and Alabama.

Scandals in connection with mail contracts became rife during Jackson's administration, and stained the history of the department at intervals during after years. The rapid extension of the service brought about much contracting, and a motley group of men used to gather from all quarters of the land at a certain time every autumn to bid for new contracts and to renew old ones. President John Quincy

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Adams in his diary describes a call which the assembled contractors paid at the White House in 1827. Assisted by Secretary Clay, he received them in the winter parlor, and at Mr. Clay's suggestion, showed them over the house. "There was cake and wine served to them, and I drank success to them all, through highways and byways."

The rapid throwing out of long lines through sparsely settled country, where expenses must necessarily be heavy and receipts small, caused a considerable deficit every year during the twenties and thirties. Furthermore, perplexing problems were coming up. A man would take a contract to handle a mail route, using one horse in the operation. The one horse was specified for the reason that if he used two horses, he would want a much higher rate, and the department was trying hard to hold down expenses. But supposing that during his contract the mail should increase until it was more than one horse could carry. What then was to be done?

There were the stagecoaches, too. In the eighteenth century our post service, like that of Europe, was intended to facilitate travel as well as to carry the mail; and even in 1835 it was still a stipulation in every mail-stage contract that accommodations for seven passengers must be provided. But when the run of mail increased to more than a ton's weight, the contractor must violate his agreement, either by refusing some passengers or by leaving some mail behind.

Of course this conflict in terms furnished some glorious loopholes for evasion and crookedness. When a contractor asserted that he could no longer handle all the mail under his agreement, an additional stipend was in most cases granted to him by Congress. Even after that, some men continued to shirk. A sample complaint came from Monticello, Kentucky, in January, 1836, when a man reported that he had just received a package of public documents sent from Washington in the previous August. The postmaster

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at Somerset had some time before written to the postmaster at Monticello, asking if he could not send a wagon for the letters, papers, documents, etc., which had accumulated at the former office. The Somerset man declared that there were more than three horseloads of such matter in his office which he couldn't get forwarded. The contractor on the route between Somerset and Monticello had recently been allowed an addition of four hundred dollars to his annual pay, yet he still used a pair of mail bags only about the size of a doctor's saddlebags, which obviously would carry only a small fraction of the quantity that arrived each day.

But this was not the worst. A wholesale changing of routes and raising of bids after the contract was secured was being permitted. This practice was euphemistically called "making improved bids"; and charges were freely made that such changes indicated corrupt bargaining. One company which bid on more than thirty routes at a price of \$37,000 a year, was shortly afterward permitted to raise the figure to \$107,000. It was known that cases of wine, boxes of cigars and other gifts were bestowed upon higher and lesser officials in the department by contractors, and hints were not lacking that money had been used also.

New Orleans was then having considerable difficulty in getting adequate service to the East, and was making frequent pleas to Congress and to the Postmaster-General. When a bill came up in Congress in 1835 providing that the department enter into contracts for a daily mail between New Orleans and Mobile, and the statement was made that such an arrangement would cost \$50,000 a year, the House promptly turned it down. The Post Office Department was already \$200,000 in debt, and steadily losing money. Hints of graft were numerous during the debate on the bill, and Representative William Cost Johnson boldly charged that the department was "corrupt from head to heels." At that, the Postmaster-General's son, Lieutenant Barry of the army,

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sent a challenge to Johnson; but friends took the matter up, effected a compromise and the challenge was withdrawn. The reports of chicanery in the department were much exaggerated, of course, by party rancor, but there was an odor about some of its transactions which was at least unfortunate.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ERA OF CHEAPER POSTAGE

Take away the high price of postage, and all letters rush into the post offices as naturally as water runs down hill.

The New Englander, 1843

WITH a regular annual deficit staring him in the face, the Postmaster-General in 1835 would have declared any one who suggested a lowering of the postage rates insane. America was going through almost precisely the same experience as did England. The rates which prevailed were practically the same as those fixed by Queen Anne's law in 1710—that law which defined a letter as “one piece of written paper, or a piece of paper enclosed in a paper bearing writing.” At first the Post Office almost had to advertise for business. In 1793 in a Kingston, New York, newspaper appeared the statement that “those gentleman who wish to have their letters forwarded by post, are requested to send them to the post-office at Kingston on Wednesday evenings.” This announcement was not purely for the public's benefit; it was also for the benefit of the service.

Sending long letters or packages of documents by mail was simply out of the question for most folk. In 1789 Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey, member of Congress, wrote to John Cleves Symmes of Cincinnati, “Do not send your packets by the mail, as the expense is heavy. The letter said to be forwarded by Major Willis was by him or some other person thrown into the post-office, and I was obliged to pay 6 shillings and 8 pence in specie for it.”

For many years six cents was the lowest possible postage

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on a letter. This would carry it only thirty miles. From there the fee ranged up to twenty-five cents for four hundred and fifty miles or over. In 1799 all rates were raised, eight cents being the lowest figure, while for a distance between three hundred and five hundred miles one must pay thirty cents, and over five hundred miles thirty-five cents. But in 1816 rates were reduced again and ranged from six to twenty-five cents, the latter figure applying to four hundred miles distance and more. And it must be remembered that, as in England, any additional bit of paper enclosed made it a double letter, two enclosures a triple letter, which doubled and tripled the postage, and so on, practically without limit.

The postage marked on every letter and charged in the waybill accompanying it (for every package of letters was fully listed, with its postage, on a waybill) was the lawful postage and must be paid unless the letter was opened in the presence of the postmaster or his clerk and an overcharge proven to them. This provision had never been very rigidly enforced, many postmasters being willing to take the recipient's word that the letter was single. But William T. Barry, the new Postmaster-General who came in with President Jackson, sent out a circular, giving his interpretation of the law and insisting upon its enforcement. Many people, he said, seemed to think that printed sheets of paper were not chargeable with letter postage; but this was an error. Everything that went by mail must pay letter postage except newspapers, pamphlets and legislative journals. More care must be used in rating letters. This was often difficult, but if the letter appeared to be double or triple it must be so marked, and if the receiver questioned the marking let him open it in the postmaster's presence if he desired the alleged error corrected. Postmasters were threatened with dismissal for failure to carry out the law and they thereupon began to enforce it strictly, causing a tumult of protest.

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Business men cried out that the whole system was a fraud upon the public. If a merchant enclosed only three bank notes or three coupons with a letter, it cost as much as four sheets of paper, though they might be as big as blankets and covered with writing. The new officials, it was charged, were merely showing off, seeking to impress their superiors with their zeal by deliberately overrating letters, and when asked for a correction, refusing to grant it unless the packet were opened in their presence. This might do in country towns, but it was preposterous in the jam around the delivery windows in the cities. A New York merchant who would not take the time to open his letters at the window and prove overcharges was said to have paid fifteen dollars excess postage in three months. But another, more hard-headed, gave up his private box and proceeded to call for his mail in person at the window and open every letter in the presence of the clerk, no matter how inconvenient it might be for himself or the public.

Others turned for relief to private conveyance by friends, associates or hired messengers. It was at one time proposed to establish a great carrier line from Boston to Baltimore, which should travel faster than the mail and handle letters more cheaply. As a matter of fact, the rapid rise in "express" and "dispatch" companies in the next few years was brought about by the exorbitance in the postal rates. For sixteen years more the country chafed under this restriction against trade and the spread of intelligence. Even the postage on single sheet letters was inequitable. The poor were prevented from keeping in touch with kinspeople and friends; for if they lived but little more than thirty miles away, the postage was a dime; a hundred miles or more meant twelve and one-half to twenty-five cents. Many emigrants to the western wilderness who for a long time had scarcely the necessities of life, could with difficulty afford one or two letters a year. Any one who made a trip east

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from a frontier village such as Chicago or St. Louis was apt to have his bags so full of other people's mail that he scarcely had room for his toothbrush; and many of the senders expected him to deliver their letters to the addressees. It came to pass that merchants and others in those towns who contemplated an eastward journey carefully concealed the fact to avoid being swamped with this gratuitous service.

Even in the East people asked travelers to carry letters to the town to which they were bound and drop them into the post office—anything to cut a few pennies off the expense. "Who goes to Hartford or New York or even to New Haven," asked an editor, "without carrying letters, unless he takes his start so suddenly that no body knows of his going?" The writer thought it probable that along the lane between Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, as many letters were carried privately as in the mails. Francis Lieber, a German traveler in the early thirties, thus relates his experience:

Suppose me, then, on board a Delaware steamboat, leaving Philadelphia early in the morning. "Sir, do you go to New York?"—"Yes, sir; why?"—"Please take these letters and throw them into the post-office." I did not know the gentleman; I took the letters, at least five in number, and had no sooner opened my carpet bag to put them in, than letters rained in from all sides, as if epistolary matter had broken loose from the clouds. The liberty which every one takes in this country, in asking you to carry letters, bundles and now and then a bandbox, though very great, is what every one is equally ready to do for you; and so, on the whole, the matter neutralizes itself and is rather a convenience. I believe this is the only civilized country in which no law exists to prohibit private persons from carrying sealed letters. It would be considered a strange interference with private concerns if ever a law of this kind should be attempted here.

Various evasions were being practiced here, as in England. Said *The New Englander* in 1843:

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No little meanness is more common with the American people than the meanness of trying to evade the payment of legal postage. How often is intelligence communicated through the mail by some cabalistic mark on the margin or the wrapper of a newspaper. How often is a double letter folded so as to pass for a single one. How often is the postmaster regarded as a sort of natural enemy, whom it is meritorious to circumvent, and the defrauding of whom is a mere spoiling of the Egyptian. A new system that would cut up these temptations by the roots would be an invaluable blessing in respect to the morals of the community.

Others saw postal employees as the greater offenders. When you declared at the window that your letter contained only one sheet, said the *American Whig Review*:

A clerk takes up the letter, feels it and eyes it. He presses it edgewise between his fingers, closing one eye and directing the axis of the other between its folds. If he feel zealous in his vocation, it is not beyond the limits of his discretion to insert a pencil or pen-holder to open the space between the leaves, and all these polite evolutions are executed in the presence and under the eye of a *gentleman* who had just passed him his word that the letter contains no enclosure.

It must be remembered that there were still no envelopes; the letter was merely folded in upon itself and sealed, so that by squeezing its edges the ends would gape slightly, and one might even read a few words of the writing inside. This sort of thing provoked even the sober *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* to say that the government apparently "looks upon all who have recourse to the mails as wreckers and smugglers and plunderers, devoid of patriotism, devoid of integrity, and requiring to be hunted and watched and treated accordingly."

High postage, governmental fumbling during those muddled years of the country's weedlike growth, and the in-

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ability of the Post Office to keep pace with the needs of a rapidly expanding nation brought about the rise of the express company, a sort of private parcel post and for a long time a letter carrier. William F. Harnden established the first express service in 1835, with headquarters in Boston. His original idea was to handle packages only, but he gradually became a sort of commission agent, being deputed to buy goods in other cities and bring them back with him. When Cunard's steamer line from Boston to England began running, Harnden was given the freight agency of the concern and opened an office in Liverpool. Business men saw at once that he would be an excellent medium for the safe transmission of letters across the ocean. He accordingly made arrangements with the government to be appointed a mail carrier; and in that capacity he received foreign letters, took them to the post office, paid the postage, put them in a mail bag of his own with a separate waybill and delivered them promptly on the other side, himself receiving the one or two-cent fee then allowed for city delivery.

Harnden's success caused numerous other lines to be started, among them that of Alvin Adams, which afterwards developed into the great Adams Express Company. In 1843 there were twenty of these concerns operating out of Boston alone. Merchants and others having correspondence in the same direction made up packages of letters which were carried by these lines for fifty cents, though they often contained letters on which the postage would have been twenty or thirty dollars. Most of the hotels had boxes in their lobbies to collect letters for some line or other, and neighboring merchants sent their letters to a designated store every day to be made into parcels. Hale's Foreign Letter Office of New York sent out broadsides or posters to various cities with the request that "Someone please tack this up." The sheet quoted a price of eighteen and three-quarter cents each for sending letters to France, England,

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South America and the West Indies (the regular postage being twenty-five cents), and six and one-quarter cents for local letters in New York City, forwarded by special messenger daily.

On one occasion a merchant sent from New York to Philadelphia forty-five thousand dollars in bills, enclosed in two pattern cards. The receiver did not know the nature of the contents for some time after the parcel came. Independent of these common carriers, there were special messengers employed by bankers and brokers who carried letters, bonds, money, etc. Two who were employed between New York and Philadelphia paid twelve hundred dollars a year railroad fare; but of course these agencies paid not a penny of revenue to the government.

By this time *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* had become convinced that "Government enterprise is wholly unable, under its most advantageous promptings, to compare with private enterprise." A considerable number of theorists urged that the handling of mails was, according to the best political economy, a private matter; that "the transmission of correspondence is no more a national concern than the construction of railways or telegraphs or the transit of passengers and goods."


Rowland Hill's revolutionary upset of all established beliefs, when he reduced letter postage in Great Britain to a penny, was watched with varying sentiments in this country. The demand for similar action here was met with the argument that cheap postage might be possible in a little country scarcely bigger than one of our states and densely populated, at that; but it would never do in so vast and thinly settled a territory as ours; and furthermore, the experiment was not yet proven a success in England.

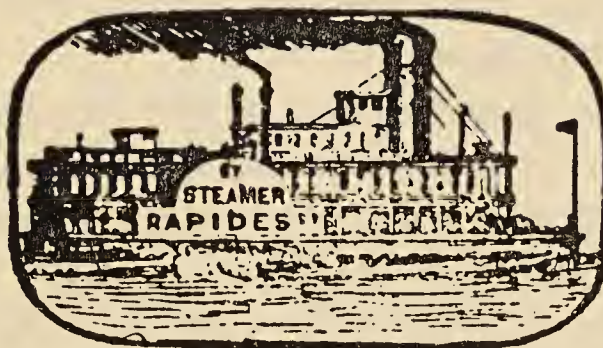
But the proponents of cheap postage kept up their hammering. One thing that caused irritation among letter writers here, as in England, was the favor shown to news-

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papers. They not only paid a low rate of postage, but each publisher was permitted to send a copy to every other publisher in the land, free of charge, and it was said that tons of them were sent out under Congressional franks. This subsidizing of the newspapers was really the making of that business in the first fifty years of our national history. Nevertheless, the publishers had their troubles with the mail service.

When it was proposed in 1790 to admit newspapers to the mails "under rules to be made by the Postmaster-General," a few hobgoblin-seers like Gerry and Burke shuddered at this "attempt to build up a Court Press and a Court Gazette." But nothing of the sort happened. On the contrary, many newspapers in after years became the severest critics of the administration and the Post Office Department. It must be admitted that the postal service dealt them some troubles as well as favors. An editor at Kingston, New York, announced in 1815 that he had been compelled to cease sending his paper by the postrider because of the cost. He had been paying one hundred and eighty-two dollars a year to circulate one hundred and seventy-five copies of his paper, the *Plebeian*, whose subscription rate was only two dollars per annum. Publishers likewise tore their hair over the tendency of postal employees to appropriate newspapers to their own use. The editor of the *Rural Visiter* (yes, that was the way he spelled it) of Burlington, New Jersey, in 1810 hints that this, rather than his own well-nigh infallible addressing system, is responsible for missing papers:

 The Editor has lately received complaints that some of his subscribers are not regularly supplied with their papers.—*He wishes them to observe*—that it must be attributed to *meddlesome* persons at the places where they receive them; as he is particularly careful to forward them to the different places of their destination; and has adopted such a method of mailing



From Scott Stamp & Coin Co., New York

HOMEMADE POSTMARKS USED IN AMERICA BEFORE THE MODERN
SYSTEM OF CANCELLATION WAS ADOPTED

Old Post Bags

those which go by mail and otherwise, that it is almost impossible to omit a single name.

The editor of the *Rural Repository*, at Hudson, New York, was less delicate in making his charges:

We hear complaints from many of our subscribers of the great freedom Post Masters take with their papers. That they are taken from their wrappers and read and given to some person who never returns them. This is a free country, but this kind of freedom is detestable. If we hear again from certain sources, we shall expose those engaged in it.

A few weeks later he came right out in print and named the post office at Albany as the place where the most heinous irregularities were occurring. He also announced that "our subscribers in the vicinity of Claverack are daily complaining to us of the slovenliness and bad management of the Claverack Post-Office" (meaning that his paper was so frequently received in a rumpled or torn condition or not received at all). "Let them get a good Post Master, they can do it, and then all will be right."

There were penalties threatened for failure to keep the mails under cover, but newspaper shipments rapidly became so bulky that they were frequently damaged by weather or rough handling. The postrider could not protect them, and the stage driver frequently used bundles or papers for a foot rest. Worse than this, the newspaper bags were neglected and often crowded out of the boot by letter mail or left behind if passenger traffic were heavy. It must be admitted that the newspaper mail became so great in weight and bulk that it was a nuisance, and the riders and stages were unable to cope with it. One hears of the passengers on a stage making up a purse of fifty dollars to pay the fine imposed on a contractor for leaving the newspaper mail behind. A traveler from Cincinnati to New York in 1835 said

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that he now understood why the newspapers sent by mail so often miscarried. Some of the bags were left at stage stations whenever the passenger travel made it desirable.

When Mark Twain journeyed to Nevada in 1861 he found a similar attitude towards newspapers on the part of the Overland Mail stage drivers and conductors.* They left St. Joseph with twenty-seven hundred pounds of mail aboard the coach, a goodly portion of it newspapers—"a little for Brigham and Carson and Frisco," explained the driver, "but the heft of it for the Injuns, which is powerful troublesome 'thout they git plenty of truck to read." A night or two later, when the thorough-brace broke in the middle of the plains, Mark learned what the driver meant. The latter remarked that by a strange coincidence, "Here is the very direction which is wrote on all the newspaper-bags which was to be put out for the Injuns to keep 'em quiet. It's most uncommon lucky, becuz it's so nation dark I should 'a' gone by unbeknowns if that air thoroughbrace hadn't broke."

Mark turned to and helped to unload the newspaper bags which were to be left behind. "It made a great pyramid by the roadside when it was all out." The conductor, however, said that he would send a guard back to look after it—and there our record of it ends.

By 1840 the railroads were beginning to make it easier to handle the newspaper mail, but the majority of the most lucrative business—that of letters—was being handled privately. It was evident that something must be done to save the service from ruin. In addition to lower postage, the re-admission of books to the mails was advocated as a step that would help. Books had fallen into disfavor thirty or forty years before because they were so bulky and difficult to carry on horseback. In 1823 the chairman of the Congressional Post Office Committee said:

* *Roughing It.*

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It appears to me that no book ought ever to be sent by mail, even if letter or packet post is paid on it. It is an article which is not, like letters and newspapers, valuable only for its quick conveyance, and may well be sent by the usual routes of many articles of merchandise.

Some years ago the postmasters at many places where books were printed construed them as subject only to pamphlet postage. The consequence was that the mails were soon overloaded with novels and the lighter kinds of books of amusement; and I was under the necessity not only of correcting this misconception . . . but to prohibit postmasters from sending books in any case through the mails.

From that time until 1845 the post therefore carried only letters, newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets. Circulars and sheet music were carried at letter rates—which meant that they were usually sent by other agencies than the mail. But now, with the increased facilities of the railroads, it was plain that things could be handled by mail which had not been accepted before. The progressives were calling attention to Great Britain where, after three or four years of trial, the penny post, to the amazement and chagrin of the conservatives, seemed finally headed towards success. The last protests of the high-rate men were finally beaten down in bitter debate, and in 1845 Congress passed the first low-postage act, and the first which made weight rather than the number of pieces of paper the basis of the postage charge. A letter weighing not more than half an ounce could now be sent three hundred miles for five cents, and anywhere save to the Pacific coast for ten cents. There were still no real postal arrangements to the coast, and as a matter of fact we controlled as yet only the upper portion of it, California being still the property of Mexico. The rate reduction was not as great as desired, but it was enough to cause a greatly increased flow of letters into the mails. Books were eligible again, and there was even a class for merchandise, which

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handled many small parcels up to the inauguration of the parcel post.

Envelopes had been introduced, but were not yet widely used. In 1847 another forward step was taken when postage stamps were introduced, to be used on paid letters, for Congress could not yet make up its mind to do away with the practice of sending letters collect, if one so desired, notwithstanding the fact that it had long been admittedly a nuisance. Numberless were the occasions when a recipient paid the postage on a letter which he would have refused had he known its contents. Niles complained in 1829 that "idle and worthless and silly persons send letters to newspapers for the manifest purpose of making them pay postage." The *Rural Repository* man declared in 1833 that he had reached the limit of his patience. Frequently he paid a quarter postage on a letter, only to find that it contained an order for a year's subscription to his paper—price one dollar. No periodical was paid for in advance in those days; and provided the customer was satisfied and no numbers of the paper had failed to reach him, the publisher might later be called upon to pay half a dollar postage on another packet containing a letter and a dollar bill in settlement of the account. "From such patronage," he moaned, "good Lord, deliver us! . . . The evil is increasing beyond our ability to bear. Hereafter letters addressed to us must be postpaid to receive attention."

And fancy sending a valentine unpaid! Q. K. Philander Doesticks, the humorist, peevishly reported one February that he had received seventeen, all unpaid, several of them being of the scurrilous variety. What an exquisite joke it must have been to send an enemy a libelous valentine and make him pay the postage on it! Current writings show that the so-called comic valentine was in vogue a full century ago. It was no cheap lithograph then, as now, but was hand-made by the sender with pen and ink—just a bit of doggerel verse

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or would-be satire, sometimes embellished with a crude drawing. It was not unusual for creditors to send valentines lampooning those who owed them. Doesticks received one from a saloonkeeper to whom he owed a bar bill.

The increasing number of unpaid letters refused by addressees had much to do with the founding of the Dead Letter Office in 1829; and when, in 1850, postage was again reduced, the stipulation was made that it must be prepaid. The new rates were, three cents per half ounce for any distance under three thousand miles, and five cents for a greater distance, always excepting the Pacific coast, which meant that very few letters carried five cents postage. These rates stood until 1863, when the coast was likewise given the benefits of cheap postal rates.

It was a long time before the new prepayment rule was fully grasped by the public. Several months after it went into effect, it was reported that one branch post office in New York City had seven hundred letters which could not be forwarded because there were no stamps on them.

For several decades a controversy raged over the question whether the posts should be handled and the offices opened on Sundays. Under Madison and Monroe many petitions were signed against the mails even moving across the country on Sunday. Postmaster-General Return Jonathan Meigs in reply pointed out how greatly they would be delayed in going long distances if they lay by on Sundays; between New Orleans and Washington, for example, they would lose three days, and between New York and New Orleans four or five days. Prior to 1810 no post office save that at Washington was required to keep open on Sunday; but the law of that year directed postmasters to attend at their offices "every day" at such hours as the Postmaster-General might direct. Granger, then at the head of the department, did not like the plan, feeling that it tended "to bring into disrepute the institution of that Holy Day." Nevertheless, ac-



From the "Illustrated London News"

THE LADIES' WINDOW AT THE NEW YORK POST OFFICE, 1845

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according to law, he directed postmasters in towns where mails arrived on Sunday to keep their offices open one hour after the arrival of the mails; but in case this should interfere with the hours of public worship, then "for one hour after the usual time of dissolving meetings."

But for years Congress was bombarded with petitions to repeal the law or stop the practice. Most of the protesters finally agreed that halting the transportation of the mail on Sunday would cause intolerable delays, but there were some who still held out. Among these were the stanch Presbyterian brethren of Princeton, who, on a Sunday in 1829, actually arrested a carrier who was passing through from New York towards Philadelphia. There was no little stir over the incident. The *Philadelphia Gazette* reported that it was not the letter mail that was stopped, but "bags containing the *Christian Advocate*, post-office quarterly returns, dead letters, etc., on their way to the General Post Office in Washington. . . . The driver, who is regularly sworn, was forcibly stopped with the mail bags by several of the inhabitants and compelled to remain until Monday morning (all out of piety)." Prosecutions were instituted against the zealots, and no more carriers were held up.

In 1849-1850 there was another wave of debate in both America and England over this question. A determined effort was made to halt Sunday delivery here, but Congress decreed that it should continue. In England the post-office authorities decided to close—which brought a roar of protest. Lawyers declared that stopping the delivery of letters and papers on Sunday was clearly illegal, that it would be possible to prove pecuniary loss by nonarrival of letters, and so on. Finally, the Post Office gave in and agreed to keep the offices open until 10 A.M. on Sundays. A somewhat similar practice prevailed until very recent years in the city post offices in this country, when at a certain hour on Sunday

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mornings, patrons were permitted to go to the carrier's room and get their mail from their own postmen.

Probably few people know to-day that our Post Office once held the telegraph business in its hands. S. F. B. Morse suggested to the Post Office Department in 1837 that it make use of the electric telegraph which he had designed several years before. But six years more passed without action; then in 1843 Congress appropriated money to build a line between Washington and Baltimore, and this was completed during the following year. For two years Morse was in the service of the government as superintendent of this line. The rate fixed in 1845 was a quarter of a cent for each telegraphic character. But after long dalliance, the government failed to purchase Morse's rights to the invention, and it passed into private hands. Again and again in after years it was vigorously urged in Congress and elsewhere that the government should control the telegraphs, but it was then too late. The United States to-day is the only great nation in the world in which the telegraph system is not operated by the government. In most countries it is under the supervision of the post-office authorities.

CHAPTER XX

THE DAYS OF GOLD

There's all the gold in the world, I'm told,
On the banks of the Sacramento.

INSCRIPTION ON EMIGRANT WAGONS OF '49

Oh, California gold mines, what a fearful curse
they've brought,
With what heartrending sorrows has that search
for dross been fraught!
How many tearful partings and how many lives
untold
Have been laid upon the altar of this raging thirst
for gold!

UNKNOWN POET in *Des Moines Journal*, 1853

ANOTHER era of remarkable expansion was the decade and a half immediately preceding the opening of the Civil War. The Star of Empire had seemed to pause as if to rest for a few years after 1829, hovering over the Great Plains while its followers filled up the vast middle-western territory just behind it. Then it shot forward again with a speed hitherto unknown in the history of nations. The annexation of Texas in 1845, the conquest of California and the clear title to Oregon in the following year, these gave it a new impetus; and those sparkling granules found in Sutter's mill race in 1848 furnished the final magnetic impulse which drew it, meteor-like, to the shores of the Pacific.

Not far behind the explorer, the fur trapper and trader, the settler and the gold seeker came the postrider. Sometimes he seemed to the pioneers a long way behind, but as

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one looks back on that age and its difficulties, the marvel is that the Post Office kept up as well as it did.

Many of the great cities west of the Mississippi had their beginnings during those fifteen years just before the Civil War. There were St. Paul and Minneapolis, for example. Fort Snelling had been a far-flung outpost of Uncle Sam since very early in the century. Before 1823 its only mail was brought perhaps twice a year by soldiers from Prairie du Chien. After that year there were boats on the Mississippi which carried the letters a little more frequently, when the river was not ice-locked. In 1846 the little hamlet of St. Paul was given a post office. Henry Jackson, also the leading merchant, hotel landlord and justice of the peace, was made postmaster. In the following year he added another laurel by going to the Legislature. With saw, ax and knife, Jackson fashioned out of an old packing box a rude set of sixteen pigeonholes which was the first post office, and which, remarkable to say, is still preserved in the museum of the Minnesota Historical Society. In 1849 the post office moved to other quarters, and now, was the announcement, "every citizen can have a box to himself."

In 1850 there were sixteen post offices in Minnesota. Minneapolis was not yet among them, but came along a little later. The only good road to the Territory in winter was on the ice of the Mississippi River from Prairie du Chien after it froze to a safe thickness. Late in 1849 a road was laid out, paralleling the river, and stage service was begun.

At that time the Hudson Bay Company had a route from the Red River of the North, near the Canadian border, westward to the Columbia, over which at intervals they carried mail, "with safety and ease," so declared the partisans of a northern route for the proposed Pacific Railroad. The riders who carried the mail might have had something different to say about the safety and ease.

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Four years before, President Polk had signed the treaty with Great Britain which dissolved the joint occupancy existing for nearly thirty years, turned Oregon (which then included Washington) over to the United States and gave British Columbia to Great Britain. Astor had founded his trading post on the Columbia in 1811; missionaries—Whitman, McLoughlin, the Lees and others—had gone to work among the Indians along the great river in the thirties. Practically the only communications with civilization were by means of the occasional Hudson Bay courier or by a still more occasional trading vessel which had come around Cape Horn. A little later, when the American Fur Company's steamboats had penetrated far up the Missouri and its tributaries, the fur pack trains crossed the mountains now and then, bringing a few cherished letters.

Many Americans were contemptuous in their opinion of Oregon in those days. Senator Dayton, of New Jersey, combating its annexation in 1844, said, "Of all the countries on the face of the earth, it is one of the least favored of Heaven. It is the mere riddling of creation. It is almost as barren as the desert of Africa, and quite as unhealthy as the Campania of Italy." Indeed, the country did not seem promising at the start. The first mails sent out there after annexation cost so much and paid so little that the Postmaster-General withdrew the service, and for a time young Portland and other settlements could get letters only by traders, immigrants or by ships from the South. But immigration increased after 1846 and express companies were organized; then the Pacific Mail steamships began coming from San Francisco, and finally overland service was established by the government.

To southward, San Antonio and Santa Fe were towns already a century old when they came under our government; isolated outposts of Mexican rule, which the swarthy, leisurely postrider from the capital reached only after many

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days of travel—three weeks to San Antonio, four to Santa Fe. In 1833 there were only two post offices in New Mexico—Santa Fe and Tomé; but the mail running once a fortnight to Chihuahua, touched at “one presidio, nine ranchos, two haciendas, three villas and seven pueblos.” The independence of Texas in 1836 endangered Santa Fe’s communication with Mexico, and for a time the mail seems to have been carried to it by Pueblo Indians on foot.

As for San Antonio and the rest of Texas, now become predominantly Nordic, they turned their eyes eastward. Other American settlements had begun to be dotted over the map; three families, for example, had settled on the site of Dallas in 1842. San Antonio sent her American mail overland to the Gulf, and thence by water to New Orleans; others in the upper part of the state managed to reach the Mississippi now and then with a letter. Even in 1850, five years after annexation, it is said that San Antonio could not hear from New York under three months. But by that time mail was traveling over the Santa Fe Trail from Missouri to New Mexico. San Antonio established communication with San Diego in 1857. Of that, more later.

In 1842 an army post was founded at the forks of the Des Moines River, which the commandant was insistent upon calling Fort Raccoon, but which the War Department was equally determined to christen Fort Des Moines. The little settlement which grew up around it received its baptism under the name of Des Moines in 1849, the first postmaster’s office being in a twelve by fourteen foot room, which he shared with a justice of the peace, two attorneys and two land agents. The postmaster himself erected a new building in the following year.

The rush for California began before the new town had got fairly started, and many who had just arrived from the East hurriedly tossed their effects in the wagon again and

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set out for the gold country. More than a thousand wagons passed through or near Des Moines in 1849. During the week ending April 17, 1850, observers there counted 252 wagons, carrying 675 persons. Of the teams, about fifty were oxen, averaging six to a wagon. During five consecutive weeks in that April and May, 1,049 wagons passed through Des Moines, accompanied by 2,813 persons and over three thousand animals. Practically all of these crossed the Missouri River at a little settlement called Kanesville. That village presently became so important that it was granted a postmaster; and when the honor was about to be consummated, the town calmly appropriated the name of a little Indian trading post farther up the river, and notified the department that its post office name would be Council Bluffs. The original Council Bluffs, unable to withstand the shock of losing its name, soon sickened and died.

A. D. Jones was a prominent pioneer in those parts. He had surveyed and platted the town of Des Moines, and later removed to Council Bluffs. Still itching with the westward urge, he decided that there ought to be a town on the opposite side of the Missouri. So he put his theodolite into a skiff, rowed across the river in the spring of 1854, laid out a metropolis, and wrote to Washington, asking that he be appointed postmaster at Omaha City. Promptly his commission came back, addressed to him at Omaha City, Territory of Nebraska; and lucky it was that it reached him, for it was the first missive ever sent to that address, and no one along the way had ever heard of such a town. For some time Jones outdid Postmaster Bailey of Chicago by carrying his entire post office in his hat. A box of four pigeonholes was his first equipment.

Missouri, as we have already seen, was one of the older colonies west of the Mississippi. A post office was established at Independence, about two hundred and seventy-five miles west of St. Louis, in 1827. Five years later another

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was set up about ten miles to westward and at first called Shawnee, later being rechristened Westport. Down on the river bank near by was a little group of huts informally called Westport Landing. The great fur companies' boats were passing up and down the Missouri, going to and from the far-off Montana mountains; and military or trading posts came into being along its banks, soon growing into highly self-conscious little towns. Three of those not far from Westport were Leavenworth, Atchison and St. Joseph, though it is true that St. Joseph's first post office was named Blacksnake Hills. From this group of half a dozen hamlets went forth some of the most famous mail lines in all history.

They were also the rendezvous for perhaps the greatest emigration ever known. In the spring of 1849, before the roads were open to westward, the whole Missouri Valley from Independence to and beyond St. Joseph was one vast camp. On May first the wave rolled westward. Within three weeks 2,850 wagons had crossed the Missouri at or near St. Joseph; 10,000 persons and 20,000 animals were said to have left Independence and Westport that spring. Most of these swerved northward to the Platte, mingling with the stream which crossed the river at Council Bluffs. At Fort Kearney by June 22d, when most of the rush had passed, there had been counted 5,516 wagons, estimated to be accompanied by 20,000 persons and 60,000 animals; and 200 more wagons were said to be on the way. Hundreds had turned back, and probably 2,000 unfortunates had died of cholera. Many thousands of the poor horses and oxen never saw Eldorado, but left their bones bleaching in the mountain wastes and the dreary valley of the Humboldt.

Since the first emigration across the plains, there had been a wistful habit of leaving notes by the way, written on bleached buffalo skulls, on bits of smooth plank, sometimes on a scrap of paper in the cleft of a stick thrust in the



From Abbot-Downing Truck & Body Co., Concord, N. H.

THE OVERLAND MAIL CROSSING THE PLAINS

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ground, mostly efforts to keep their fellow men informed of their progress in case of disaster. On the North Fork of the Platte, at a spring in a little glen called Ash Hollow, the emigrants of '46 had set up a postmasterless post office in a cabin built by trappers the previous winter and abandoned. Here, in a recess in the wall, during the years that followed, were left scores and hundreds of letters, all with the request that some eastbound wayfarer would take them and drop them into the first post office he reached in the states.

The year 1850 was an eventful one in the mail service. It was then that the first contract was let for an overland route west of Missouri—to Samuel Woodson, who was to carry the mail to Salt Lake. On July 1st the first regular mail that ever ventured west of the Missouri border left Independence, strongly guarded against Indian attack, for the capital of Brigham Young's mountain-girt empire, then just beginning to come into its power. Beyond Salt Lake lay the Sierras, which the post durst not as yet attempt; but in that same year a contract was signed for the carriage of the mail from Independence to Santa Fe, along the old Santa Fe Trail, which pack and wagon trains had been traversing for nearly thirty years.

The toils and dangers of the mountains and the hot southern deserts, the fear of the Indians and enormous expense involved prevented for a long time the establishment of mail service across country to California. For decades California had had a fair postal system of its own under Mexican rule, principally a long north-and-south line, running, after 1770, from Loreto, near the southern tip of the long peninsula of Lower California, up to Monterey, in Alta (now the state of) California, and after 1776 extending on to Yerba Buena, the little military and mission post at the Golden Gate, where now stands one of the world's most famous seaports.

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This route was full fifteen hundred miles in length, five hundred miles more than the longest mail route (that from Falmouth, Maine, to Savannah, Georgia) in the United States up to 1800. And the California line was not, like ours, made up of many short carries with numerous transfers, but was a continuous one. The Spanish soldier mail carrier rode from one end of the long route to the other, collecting and leaving little packets of letters at each mission, presidio and pueblo; and favored by California's dependable climate, dry roads and more genial Indians than those farther east, he was able to ride to a schedule which named the day and hour of his arrival at each stopping place. He was permitted a one-hour pause at each important stopping place, but they were not numerous. It is recorded that in 1793 a mail courier once rode from Monterey to Loreto, fourteen hundred miles, in twenty days. From Loreto the mail was carried across the gulf to the mainland and thence to Mexico. An all-overland route, crossing the Colorado River and going through Sonora, would have been shorter and more desirable had it not been for the peevish tempers of the Yaqui Indians, who infested a portion of that way; but at times, when they were temporarily in check, it was used. Early in the nineteenth century the coastwise boat service between Mexico and Alta California was much improved, and was being largely employed.

A few "Yanquis"—not Yaquis, but regarded by some Mexicans as being probably of the same species—were drifting into California in those early days, to go into ranching, storekeeping or prospecting. They were about as well isolated from their homeland as if they had been in Asia. "A year-old newspaper from the States was fresh and interesting in 1835."* An American resident in Los Angeles recorded in his diary the news of the death of

* From J. M. Guinn's excellent *History of Los Angeles*, which has supplied a number of other facts for this chapter.

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President William Henry Harrison, which had reached him three months and twenty days after the occurrence.

After Stockton and Frémont had taken possession of California in 1846-1847, the United States military authorities established a regular mail route between San Francisco and San Diego. Soldier couriers, starting from each terminus, met at Dana's Ranch near San Luis Obispo and exchanged bags, returning thence to their own posts. The whole journey occupied two weeks. The law of April 14, 1848, was the first effort by Congress to give California postal service. By this act letters to and from the Pacific coast cost forty cents; and for a time they went the long route around Cape Horn. Between towns along the California coast the fee was twelve and one-half cents.

It was during this period that the second of the two southern extremities of the globe's continents was given its automatic post office. The one on the Straits of Magellan, near Cape Horn, was a slight improvement over the earlier one at the Cape of Good Hope. Travelers supposed to have visited it said that it consisted of a large keg fastened to a bit of spar, slightly above the ground and between two rocks, so that it was partially sheltered from the wind; that it was carefully tarred all over and had a close-fitting sheet-iron lid, attached by a leather hinge. For twenty years and more, so the reports go, vessels would cast anchor near by and an officer would be rowed ashore to see if there might be mail in the keg, and perchance to leave a letter or two bound in the opposite direction from their own. If a ship could help a letter on its way, it was taken and carried on; and it is pleasant to be assured that no violation of the trust was ever known.

Even before postal legislation was enacted for California, American enterprise, already stirring in the promising little seaport of San Francisco, had begun to send forth letters by private express. Charles L. Cady organized the first local

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express in August, 1847, sending letters once a week between San Francisco and Fort Sacramento for twenty-five cents each, and also carrying mail for way stations such as Sausalito, Petaluma and Napa.

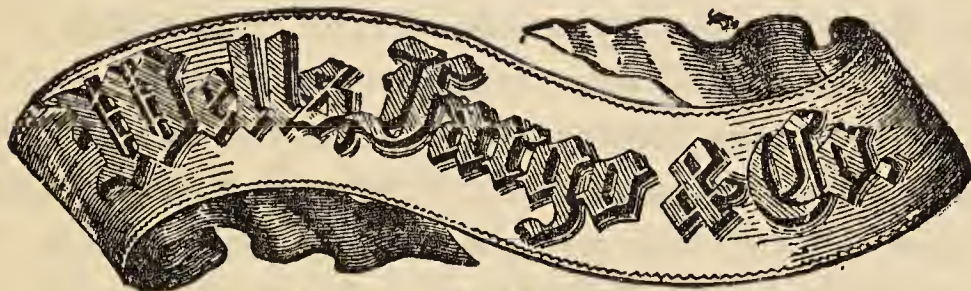
In 1848 the first overland express courier to the East was sent from San Francisco by the *California Star*, which announced on March 1st that "we are about to send letters by express to the States at 50 cents each, papers, 12½ cents; to start April 15th; any mail arriving after that time will be returned to the writers." The capacity of the rider's bag being limited, the proprietors were unable to find room to send any copies of the rival paper, the *Californian*. This line did not endure long.

The first post office in California was that established at San Francisco, November 9, 1848. The first express line of any real consequence was that of Weld & Company, organized in 1849, which ran from San Francisco to Marysville, via Benicia and Sacramento. Thereafter other express companies sprang up as thick as grass blades. The *Alta California* said in January, 1850, "So many new express companies are starting daily that we can scarcely keep the run of them." At first their business consisted mostly of carrying the letters of the miners and of the mining companies which popped magically into existence, turning whiskered, horny-handed prospectors overnight into corporation presidents wearing boiled shirts, varnished boots and diamond rings. The letters came mostly through the San Francisco post office and were distributed thence through the mountains by the private lines. The miner, says Guinn, "would gladly give an ounce of gold to hear from home," but he was busy and could not afford to put hundreds of dollars in money and time into a trip to Frisco every month just to get his letters. "We scarcely know," said the *Alta California*, "what we should do if it were not for the various express lines, which enable us to hold communication with



SALMON RIVER & NEZ PERCES
EXPRESS.

PAID 75 CENTS.



Paid 12½ Cts.

From Scott Stamp & Coin Co., New York

POSTMARKS OF EXPRESS COMPANIES WHICH CARRIED MAIL

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the mines. With the present defective mail service, we should scarcely ever be able to hear from the towns throughout California or from the remote portions of the Placers, north and south."

Adams & Company, established in 1850, became for a time the leading company on the coast. They sought the fastest of horses, and some of their riders' feats of speed surpassed those of the Pony Express of several years later. One man rode from Placerville to Sacramento, sixty-four miles, in two hours and fifty minutes. Frank Ryan rode seventy-five miles in four hours and twenty minutes. On his favorite horse, Colonel, he covered twenty miles in fifty-five minutes.

Within a few years all important towns and mining camps in the western mountains were linked together by a network of express lines, extending from Mexico to Canada. The names of some of them have a haunting tang of those vivid days—Yankee Jim's Express, Loon Creek Express, Hall & Allen's Dutch Flat Express, Randall & Jones's Canyon City Express, Rhodes & Whitney's Yreka Express, Oroville & Susanville Express, Salmon River & Nez Perces Express (Idaho), James & Co.'s Kootenai Express, Waldron & Co.'s Blackfoot Express, Barnard's British Columbia Express. A stamp collector of to-day would almost be tempted to slay his fellow for one of their franks or postmarks.

One of the many bizarre developments of the period was the express business operated by Charles P. Kimball, a native of Bangor, Maine, who ran a stationery store in San Francisco. In connection with this business he began the practice of collecting letters destined for the East, and forwarding them by the ships which ran via Panama and Nicaragua. Just before a ship's sailing he would walk the streets, announcing his mission in a powerful baritone voice—and collecting the letters; which presently earned for him the nickname of the Noisy Carrier. He adopted the sobriquet as the name of his service, and it appeared on the several

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postmarks of the prosperous business which he operated for several years.

The greatest express company of them all was Wells, Fargo & Company, organized in the East in 1852. Henry Wells and William C. Fargo had been in and out of several express companies since 1843, including one partnership with John Butterfield, who later launched the Overland Mail. Their operations had hitherto all been in the East; but with the organization of Wells, Fargo & Company the partners decided to invade the West; and they did so with such effect that they eventually became perhaps the most powerful express organization in the world, swallowing up most of the smaller companies and extending their operations to Canada, Mexico, the Pacific Islands and Asia.

The *Stamp Collectors' Magazine* in 1865 thus described the Wells-Fargo method of handling letters at that time:

Wells & Fargo buy the post-office envelopes bearing the government stamp, and then put their own stamp or frank upon them, and sell the same for 10c each; and in these envelopes, thus double stamped, all the letters by express are carried. Where the letters are above the single rate, additional government stamps are put on and charged for by the company.

The extent of this business is shown by the fact that Wells & Fargo bought of the government in 1863 over 2,000,000 of three cent envelopes, 15,000 of six cent envelopes, and 30,000 of ten and eighteen cent ones, besides 70,000 of extra three cent stamps and 12,500 of six cent ditto. In 1864 the business increased, as it has steadily all along, and the three cent envelopes bought and sold by Wells & Fargo in 1864 were nearly 2,250,000, and the extra stamps about 125,000. Thus all the agencies of Wells & Fargo are private post-offices, doing the business of the government better and more satisfactorily than it does itself, and paying the government its full price for the same.

Marvelous the quickness with which new enterprises flashed into being at the waving of the magic wand of gold! A

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company of Americans began with feverish haste in 1850 to build a railway across the Isthmus of Panama; and almost simultaneously the Pacific Mail Steamship Company was organized, with a fleet of four vessels, two to operate from New York to Aspinwall (Colon), and two from San Francisco to the city of Panama. The struggle against jungle, mountain and climate prolonged the building of the railroad to five years' time; but meanwhile it carried freight, passengers and mail as far as it could, and horse vehicles did the rest. The steamship company was not unmindful of local business, and during portions of its early career it made stops at Havana, New Orleans and Vera Cruz on the Atlantic side and at Acapulco and other ports on the Pacific. Thus the journey from New York to San Francisco was prolonged to three months. The Pacific Mail also extended its lines beyond San Francisco to Oregon and British Columbia.

A "route agent" accompanied the mail throughout its journey between New York and San Francisco. The department's instructions to him were that "you are to employ all your time and energy towards the safe transmission of the mails over the whole route, and particularly across the Isthmus of Panama." He was cautioned not to handle anything save the United States mail and not to have any private business in San Francisco. One of his duties was that of "apprehending any letters being illegally conveyed by persons on shipboard." The Panama Railroad provided free carriage for the mail and the agent over its line. If anything occurred to delay the train, the agent was authorized to requisition vehicles to complete the trip, so as not to miss the ship. He was cautioned to select quarters dry and safe in which to stow the bags, and to stay with them, especially while crossing the isthmus. Also, "you will occasionally count the bags."

How eagerly that mail was awaited at San Francisco! "Steamer day" was the most important in the calendar.

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Often the agent and the man carrying the mail bags from wharf to post office had to force their way for blocks through a jostling, wistful crowd. But even then, two days sometimes elapsed before the mail could be sorted, ready for delivery, even though the office force worked day and night. Rev. William Taylor, who in 1849 began adding his touch to that colorful canvas by preaching on the streets on Sundays, had a keen and sympathetic eye for the crowds who awaited the mails:

The greatest local attraction of the heterogeneous masses . . . is the post-office. Thousands of men here who never were absent from their wives and children a week at any one time, till they started for California; thousands of young men who scarcely ever were out of sight of the smoke of their mothers' chimneys till they bade good-by to the old folks, to try their fortunes in the land of gold; hundreds of young lovers, bound by sleepless affection and plighted faith to virgins beautiful and lovely, to whom they would certainly return in two years, which was all the time any decent man could ask to make a fortune in California. Six months would probably realize all their hopes, but to be certain of no disappointment to the fair ones, the time was set for two years. How desolate the hearts of these different classes of men, in the absence of all those objects of home attraction and affection, in this vast social Sahara! The only substitutes for them were the little drops and glimpses of social life and light obtained through the post office.

The line-up was apt to begin twenty-four hours before the windows opened; and after they opened, one might be five or six hours in reaching the window. The row of anxious faces was from one to two hundred yards or more in length, and did not shorten much during the first day of the rush. Men sometimes bought a place near the window for five dollars; nay, eager ones whom fortune had favored paid twenty-five dollars and even on some occasions a fifty dollar gold slug for a good position. The poor and unlucky

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went early and secured good locations, so that they might sell out—and when they had sold, rushed back and fell in line again. Up and down the line passed newsboys and vendors of candy, pop corn, cakes, pies and coffee. News-dealers contrived to get their mail early, and the cries of their boy salesmen were heard, "Latest news from the East! Arrival of the John L. Stephens! Here's your New York *Tribune* and New Orleans *True Delta*!"

The first post office at San Francisco had two "windows of delivery"; one for the "navy and army, the French, Spanish, Chinese, clergy and the ladies," the other for the undistinguished masculine masses who made up the greater part of the population of California. Some time later a new and larger office was fitted up in Portsmouth House, on the west side of the Plaza. Here there were numerous windows; one for navy and army, one for French, Spanish and Chinese, one for clergy and ladies, while the masses were served alphabetically at several other windows—*A* to *D*, *E* to *H* and so on.

Let Mr. Taylor proceed with his picture:

To look at the anxious countenances of the men at the windows was painfully interesting. One man gets a letter and breaks it open, expecting news from home, but lo! it is a letter of introduction from some man he never saw, who has "taken the liberty of referring a particular friend" to him for information. . . . He tears up his only letter, and hopes never to be introduced to that "particular friend." Another is waiting in great suspense, but the postmaster says: "Nothing for you, sir."

"Please, sir, look again," says the expectant.

"Nothing for you, sir."

Turning away, he says: "I came around Cape Horn, and they were to commence writing after I had been out a month, and now it is eight months and I haven't got a letter."

The next one gets a letter, and breaking it open as he turns away, you see him trembling with agonized emotion. You know at once that some dread bolt from that letter, but little less power-

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ful than a thunderbolt, has struck him. You see no tears, for they seem to be frozen up in their fountains. The only utterance you hear from his lips, broken and involuntary, as he retires from the crowd, is: "O, my God, she is dead!"

The next man awaits his portion with trembling. He gets a letter, pays forty cents postage on it and breaks it open to get the news from home. "Pshaw!" says he, "I think a fellow writing to know whether he had better come to California might pay the postage on his letter. I shall tell him to stay at home."

A man takes out a letter and reads, and presses it to his lips, and reads on, and kisses it again and again. His tears break through a windrow of smiles on his face. It is from his dear wife; and John and Mary and Lizzie have all added a postscript.

Another poor fellow, as he turns away in deep disappointment, says: "I have not received a letter from my family in two years. Thinking it might be the fault of the Mountain Express men, I have come down here, three hundred miles, and have spent \$150 to try to get one letter from home, and I can't get it. I'll just quit writing! It's no use!" . . .

The post-office has usually been closed on the Sabbath in San Francisco, from the first, except when the mails arrive on Saturday night, too late for distribution. On one of these occasions, the general delivery was opened at the hour I was by appointment to preach on the Plaza, in the immediate vicinity where the lines formed and passed. As I was about to commence the announcement of my "news from a far country," a man came up in a hurry and said to me, "Is this the line to the A and D window?" "I don't know, sir," replied I. "I am about forming a line, sir, to travel to the kingdom of heaven. I shall be very glad to have you fall into our line, sir, and go with us." "I don't wish to go there yet, sir," said he; "I want my letters from home."

Not until 1859 was there a mail carrier in San Francisco. The first carrier was Tim Mahoney, who operated under the old law of 1794, which permitted a postman to collect two cents on every letter delivered. The collection of such a fee in the Far West of the fifties, however, would have been laughed at. In fact, it would have been impossible, for

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there were no copper nor yet nickel coins in use, and even a dime was a curiosity. Tim's smallest fee on a letter was twenty-five cents, and many, in the spirit of the age, handed the postman fifty cents or even a dollar. Finally, business became so good that Tim dropped all the "two-bit" patrons and specialized in the dollar ones. But his Irish heart was touched one day when he saw in the mail a letter addressed:

To Jack Hayes.

Please give him this letter. It is from his old mother.

He is somewhere in California.

Mahoney resolved to find Jack Hayes if he was in California. For days and weeks he searched the city, even asking men from the Sierra gold camps if they knew the name. But at last he found his man, stretched on a hard pallet in a filthy lodging house just off Bush Street, dying of tuberculosis.

"Must be some mistake," he whispered in answer to Tim's question. "I don't expect any letter. I quarreled with the old folks and vamoosed from home ten years ago."

But Mahoney opened the letter and found that it was no mistake. In a breaking voice he read it aloud. It was a cry of forgiveness and yearning, sent forth hopefully into the ether by a mother whose love had never faltered. The dying prodigal and the postman wept together over it; and when Mahoney tiptoed away, not only had he collected no fee, but he left money behind him.

Joshua Rines, a postman of the sixties, had no regulation bag, but used two gunny sacks. He would carry them, filled, to a saloon in his busiest territory and leave one there behind the bar while he delivered the mail from the other; then come back for the second bag. He said that his mail was never molested. Many a dollar tip did Rines collect for a letter, and sometimes more when the addressee was "flush."

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There was one gambler who never gave him less than five dollars for a letter. Ah, those were the days!

The Pacific Mail Line was not permitted a peaceful monopoly of carrying the post via the Isthmus. Other lines were started and a dozen new routes were planned. In 1853 the government signed a contract with two Pennsylvanians who were to carry mail from New Orleans by steamer to Vera Cruz, and thence by fast horse vehicles across Mexico to Acapulco, whence the Pacific Mail steamships took it to San Francisco. But oddly enough, the Pacific Mail ships quickly ceased to find it profitable to call at Acapulco, and the scheme was left dangling in air. By the Gadsden Treaty of December 3, 1853, the United States secured permission to establish a mail route across Mexican territory, but no other promoter cared to attempt such an enterprise until 1858, when the Louisiana Tehuantepec Company was organized, and carried the mail for one year via Vera Cruz and Acapulco. This route was then abandoned.

The gold rush drew the attention of Commodore Vanderbilt, that giant of transportation, to the possibilities in a California route, and in 1850-1851 he secured from the government of Nicaragua not only a route for a transit company but also the right to build a transoceanic canal. The latter concession he never utilized, but he promptly established a line of steamers from New York to Greytown, on the east coast, thence other steamers which ran up the San Juan River and through Lake Nicaragua, and finally established twenty-five stagecoaches on the short portage between the lake and the Pacific port of San Juan del Sur, whence other of his vessels carried the passengers and mails to San Francisco. Letters carried by his route were vauntingly post-marked, "Ahead of the Mails" or "In Advance of the Mails."

While Vanderbilt was absent in Europe in 1854-1855, his two chief associates, Charles Morgan of New York and

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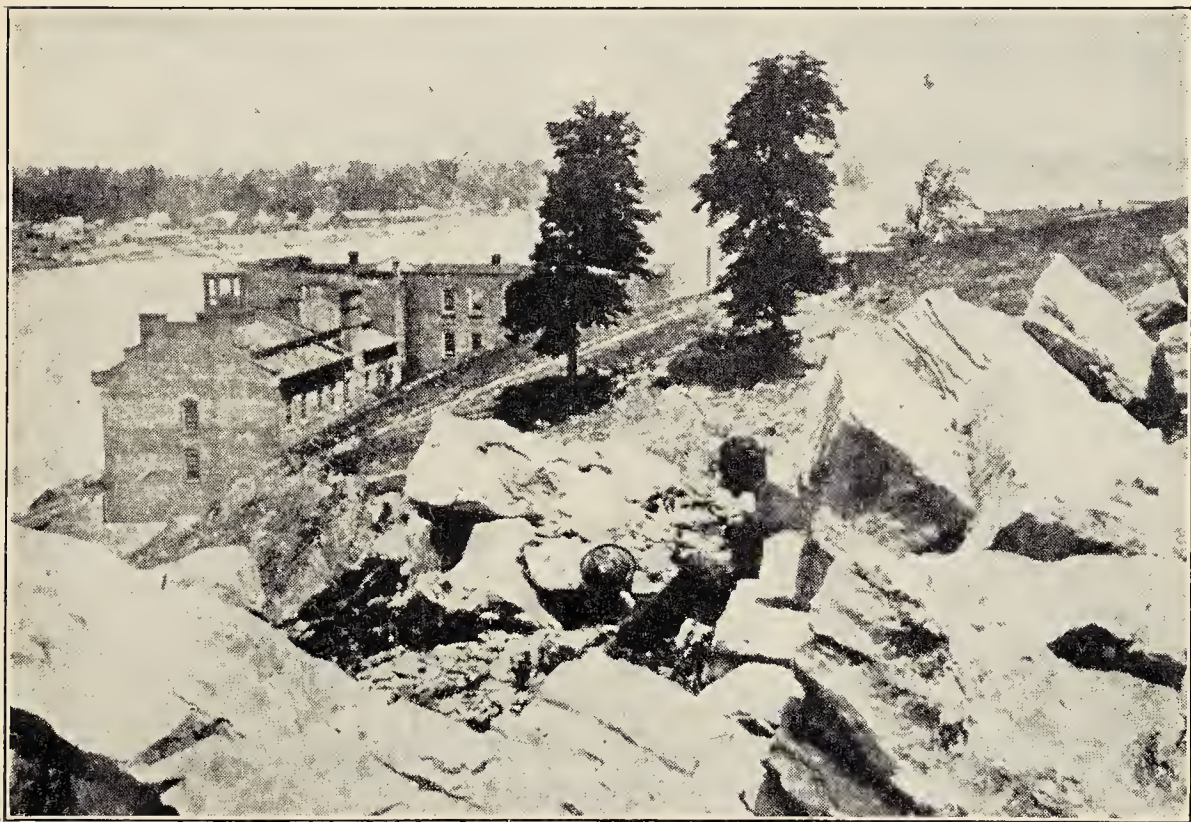
Cornelius K. Garrison of San Francisco, secured control of the company, partly by connivance with William Walker, the American filibuster who had seized the reins of power in Nicaragua. Vanderbilt, returning to America, counterplotted against both Walker and his own treacherous partners and succeeded in overthrowing them all. But by 1859 the Commodore was becoming so busy with railroads and with a projected steamship line to Europe that he lost interest in the Nicaragua transit route, and sold it to the Pacific Mail Company.

There were many in the East—investors in the mines, people whose kinsmen had gone to seek their fortunes there and so on—who were almost as eager for the mail as the Californians. The eastern press of course depended for its western news entirely on letters and newspapers from California. The arrival of a vessel in New York brought on a scramble to get her news in type before the forms were closed. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* for April 24, 1858, gives an interesting digest of a steamer's mail:

The *Star of the West* has brought fourteen days later news. Her date is March 22—her treasure, \$1,352,000 specie, and 163 passengers. There was nothing of any political importance. Two young ladies had taken the veil at Sacramento on the 19th, and on the 13th nearly 2,000 cattle were drowned by the heavy rains in the upper Sacramento. We may mention as a pleasant item that a company of Germans had purchased 300 acres and were converting it into a vineyard. . . . The rancho of Mr. Oden, who was absent at the time, was burnt on the 14th ult. It was near San Juan Monterey. In its ashes were found the remains of Mrs. Oden, her four children, and Miss Burns, their governess. It is supposed they were murdered. Mr. and Mrs. Wallack are playing in San Francisco. Mr. and Mrs. John Wood are in Sacramento. Yankee Adams and Miss Rowena Granice were married on the 5th of March in Sacramento. Generally speaking, theatricals dull. Much interest has been created by a Chinese regatta at Sacramento on the 17th ult.



LINING UP FOR MAIL AT THE FIRST POST OFFICE IN SAN FRANCISCO,
1851



From Postmaster, Kansas City .

FIRST POST OFFICE AT KANSAS CITY, IN THE FIFTIES

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Six boats were entered. Two were manned by butchers, two by fishermen and two by washermen. The stakes amounted to \$1,250. The race was well contested and was witnessed by an immense assemblage of Celestials, New Yorkers, Californians and the rest of the world. A large number of the legislative assembly were there. . . . Reports from San Bernardino state that 840 discontented Mormons, including women and children, are on their way from Salt Lake to Los Angeles. The price of drinks in Sonora has been reduced from a quarter to a bit. A strange instance of the increasing spread of the English language has been afforded in the breaking up the French Dramatic Company, which has been here for the last seven years, etc., etc.

The gold excitement farther north meant nothing to the sleepy little town of Los Angeles. She seemed to have no resources or attractions save climate, and for a long time these availed her nothing. After the Mexican War soldier mail carriers were removed late in 1848, a supposed semi-monthly sailing vessel carried mail between San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego; that is, the captain or supercargo accepted letters and left them in some warehouse or shipping office. In 1849 Los Angeles had not even a post office—nothing but a washtub kept by the courtesy of a merchant on the end of his counter, into which the town's letters were dumped, for any one to look through at his pleasure. Even after a postmaster was appointed in 1850, his salary was so small that he must have some other business also, and while he was attending to that, patrons searched through the pigeonholed soap box for their letters. In the winter of 1852-1853, no mail was received for six weeks.

San Diego, after several equally uneventful years under American occupation, seemed destined to become the leading town in southern California, when, in 1857, she was connected with San Antonio de Bexar by a mail line. At first there was merely a rider leading a second horse, loaded

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with bags. The San Diego *Herald* three days later said that the mail would be carried "on pack animals until wagons, which are being pushed across, will have been put on the line." In other words, this line went through the usual metamorphosis of the western mail route: first the rider, next the buckboard or spring wagon, and then the stage-coach. In the early days of the service, it was sometimes necessary to sling the bags across the Pecos River by ropes of hide. The journey at first occupied a month or more—fancy spending a summer month in a wagon, jolting across those hot wastes!—but after a few trips, it was once accomplished "in the extraordinary short time of 26 days and 12 hours," and the *Herald* issued an extra, "announcing the very gratifying fact of the complete triumph of the southern route, notwithstanding the croakings of many of the opponents of the administration in this State."

The mention of the southern route hints not at a stage line alone, but at the violent controversy then going on over the possible route of the projected transcontinental railway, surveys for which had been going on for several years over southern, middle and northern courses. San Diego's triumph in its mail line was short-lived; for in the following year the first real overland stage linking the East with California was started with St. Louis and Memphis as its eastern terminals and San Francisco as the western; and San Diego was not only off the route, but her line to San Antonio was killed, for the new concern covered most of its route. This first overland mail venture was promoted by John Butterfield, one of the founders of the American Express Company; and among his associates were William C. Fargo and William B. Dinsmore, later president of the Adams Express Company.

The lines from St. Louis and Memphis converged at Fort Smith. Thence the route lay through Sherman, Fort Belknap, El Paso, Tucson, Fort Yuma, Los Angeles, Visalia

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and San José, following to a considerable degree the later route of the Southern Pacific Railroad. A four-horse coach left St. Louis and San Francisco simultaneously and amid considerable enthusiasm on September 16th. That from the east end was driven by John Butterfield, Jr., and W. L. Ormsby, special correspondent of the New York *Herald*, was the first and only through passenger of the trip. The contract time was twenty-five days, and both coaches bettered it. Of the eastbound stage, *Frank Leslie's* said,

One of the most important events since the conquest of our Pacific empire was consummated on Saturday, the 9th of October. On that day the first mail overland from San Francisco reached St. Louis, Mo., having accomplished the distance in 23 days and 4 hours, or 1 day and 20 hours shorter than contract time! New York and California are now in direct communication with each other by a line of travel exempt from the dangers and annoyances of the sea; the time of passage has been shortened by at least a week.

When the first coach reached St. Louis, a band and a long parade escorted the mail to the post office, and there was a great demonstration in honor of Butterfield. At the other end the enthusiasm was perhaps greater. The mail passed through Los Angeles on the seventh and reached San Francisco on the tenth of October, more than a day ahead of time. The *Alta California* came out with a special heading depicting the coach at full gallop. A great mass meeting was held on the following evening, "for the purpose of expressing the sense entertained by the city of the great benefits she is to receive from the establishment of the Overland Mail." The speaker of the evening enthusiastically said that:

In my opinion, one of the greatest blessings that could befall California would be to discontinue at once all communication by steamer between San Francisco and New York. On yesterday

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we received advices from New York, New Orleans and St. Louis in less than twenty-four days, via El Paso. Next to the discovery of gold, this is the most important fact yet developed in the history of California.

Ormsby, the *Herald* correspondent, was introduced amid great applause, and gave a description of the journey.

Los Angeles was now triumphant; it received eastern news three days ahead of San Francisco, and the press boasted of it. When, after several trips, a coach came through from St. Louis to Los Angeles in twenty days, the *Star* dashed off an extra with vivid headlines: "Ahead of Time"; "A Hundred Guns for the Overland Mail"; "Twenty Days from St. Louis." But alas! the post office was too sleepy to keep pace with it, and the very next issue of the *Star* sadly records that "the overland mail arrived at midnight. There was no one in the post office to receive it, and it was carried to San Francisco"—whence it came back six days later, all stale, and accompanied by the San Francisco papers containing all its eastern news.

This first Butterfield stage line was the longest in history (about 2,800 miles) and though beset by dangers and difficulties, was remarkably regular and well managed. It was a costly one to operate. It was necessary to haul water long distances to the relay stations in big tanks on wheels drawn by six or eight mules. The line ran through the territory of the Comanches and Apaches, two of the most vicious of all Indian tribes, and was further harassed by desperadoes from the Mexican border. And yet the Los Angeles *Star* declared that "the arrival of the overland mail is as regular as the index on the clock points to the hour, as true to time as the dial is to the sun."

The government paid Butterfield \$600,000 a year for two mail coaches each way per week; and in 1859 its postal income from this route was only \$27,000. The coaches were unable to carry more than a tithe of the mail, and most of it

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still went via Panama and Nicaragua. Even the limited number of bags which they carried filled up both front and rear boots, were piled on the roof and in the bottom of the coach, so that passengers had nowhere to put their feet, but perched or lay on the heaps as best they could. Postmaster-General Holt in his report for 1859 said:

Until a railroad shall have been constructed across the continent, the conveyance of the Pacific mail overland must be regarded as wholly impracticable. . . . The \$600,000 paid annually for carrying a few sacks of letters from the Mississippi to San Francisco via El Paso, through a waste and uninhabited country, would defray the aggregate cost of mail transportation . . . in the states of Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina.

He added that if all the mail were sent by the overland route, it would require ten coaches instead of one at a trip, and would cost the government six million dollars a year. The annual loss on the six great routes in the West was then \$1,178,629.

Among the six routes mentioned was a new one from Independence to Santa Fe, set in operation in 1857 by Hockaday & Hall, leaving twice a month and going through in from twenty to twenty-five days. The passenger fare from November 1st to May 1st was one hundred and fifty dollars, and from May to November one hundred dollars. "Provisions, arms and ammunition furnished by the proprietors." For a time during the fifties, the mail from the East came up the Missouri River to Independence and Westport by boat. Westport Landing had received a post office in 1845 as "the Town of Kansas"; later altered to Kansas City; and now it was becoming the important town of the district. The Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad was building across Missouri, and when it reached Cameron in 1858, a stage line was run from there to Kansas City.

Meanwhile a connecting line, also handling mail, had been

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extended from Salt Lake City west to Sacramento; but the time was slower by these combined routes, and the through mail to California was not offered to them. When Chorpening, proprietor of the Salt Lake-Sacramento line, ordered ten new coaches from Concord, New Hampshire, in 1858, they reached Atchison by Missouri River boat, were met there by a force of Chorpening's men and horses, and were driven from there across plains and mountains, nearly thirteen hundred miles, to Salt Lake City, where they were to begin their work.

Brigham Young in 1857 conceived the idea of taking the stage lines running out of Salt Lake under Mormon control, and planned the organization of a huge concern, The B. Y. Express Company, for that purpose; but his church came so close to war with the United States during the months that followed that the project was abandoned; in fact, even the existing mail and passenger line from the East was cut off for a time.

Next, John M. Hockaday received a contract for a weekly mail from the Missouri to Salt Lake at \$190,000 a year, which he sold in 1859 to a firm famous in the history of the West, Russell, Majors & Waddell. These men, all Missourians, were the colossi of the overland freighting business. Their government contract for the year 1858 for hauling supplies to the western military posts involved the moving of sixteen million pounds of material, which necessitated the use of forty thousand oxen, one thousand mules, thirty-five hundred to four thousand wagons and over four thousand men. This, together with their freighting for private interests, is said, at the height of their career, to have kept seventy-five thousand oxen busy. They had famous scouts of their own, among them Kit Carson, Bill Comstock and California Joe. Little Billy Cody went into their service when he was only eleven; and a year or two later he was riding as a messenger, carry-

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ing dispatches from their office in Leavenworth to the wagon trains en route.

Gold was discovered in Colorado in 1858, and the slogan of the westbound pioneer now became, "Pike's Peak or Bust." The town of Auraria was founded on Cherry Creek that year, and just across the creek in the following spring the rival camp of Denver, destined soon to swallow up Auraria, was born. Action was rapid in those dynamic days; in the popular phrase, no one let any grass grow under his feet, and two rival lines quickly began fighting for Colorado business—the Central Overland California line, operated by Russell, Majors & Waddell, and the Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company, which began running coaches from Leavenworth to Denver in May, 1859, but which was soon taken over by its rival.

When the Civil War broke out, early in 1861, the Butterfield southern route was rendered impossible. The Confederates began menacing it in Arkansas and Texas, and the Apaches, egged on by southern influence, stole its horses and destroyed its stations farther west. The government soon ordered the mail transferred to the central route, through Salt Lake. A new contract was signed for a six-days-per-week service from St. Louis to Placerville, California, mail to be carried on steamboats to St. Joseph, and by coach from there. Mail from Chicago and other north points was to reach "St. Jo" by the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad. Several rail lines were rushing their tracks westward—the Northwestern and the Burlington towards Omaha and the Missouri Pacific towards Kansas City. A test was held to see which road could show the most speed, and the Hannibal & St. Joseph ran a train across the state, two hundred and six miles, in four hours and fifty minutes. St. Joseph thus became the starting point for the great Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company stages. But it held the honor only a few months; for rail-

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road connection was extended to Atchison, and a careful measurement showing that that town was fourteen miles farther west than St. Joseph, it was made the terminus of the stage line.

The Sierra Nevada was the great stumblingblock on the central route. There were times when snow blocked the road in the passes of that great range so that neither coach nor single horse could get through for days or weeks. Just the other day in Los Angeles a tablet was unveiled to the memory of the one man who closed the gap at such times. "Snowshoe" Thompson was a miner at Hangtown, later Placerville, in the winter of 1856 when the eastbound mail towards Salt Lake was halted there by news that the Sierra road was blocked by snow. Thompson volunteered to carry the mail across the range to Carson City. Others thought him foolhardy, but he donned a pair of skis which he had formerly used in his native Norway, slung the mail on his back and sped away. Placerville gamblers wagered that he would never return, but he was back within a week with the mail from the East. Thereafter, for several years Thompson closed the Sierra break in the mail service at the time of snow blockades.

But in the meantime, St. Joseph had been made the starting point of the most famous mail route in all history or romance—the Pony Express. This line was the dream of William M. Gwin, a California senator, southern born, a student and romantic adventurer. He fought for the South during the Civil War and later in Mexico under Maximilian, who made him Duke of Sonora. In his latter life in California, when broken in fortune, he was popularly known as Duke Gwin.

In 1854, after he had been elected senator from California, he rode eastward to the Missouri River in company with Ben Ficklin, a division superintendent for Russell, Majors & Waddell. On that ride the idea of the Pony

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Express is said to have been born. They talked of the feats of Francis Aubrey, a French Canadian who, in 1852, on a wager, rode from Santa Fe to Independence, eight hundred miles, in eight days; and a year later did it in five days and thirteen hours. This suggested the idea of fast mail riders across the plains. When he reached Washington, Gwin framed a bill providing for fleet express mail service from Missouri to California, but his measure was killed. His secret hope was that by such a line California might be bound to the South and come into the Union as a slave state.

The government would not risk the venture, but there was another group of men ready to try anything—namely, Russell, Majors & Waddell. There has long been a pretty story that William H. Russell, one of the partners, made a two-hundred-thousand-dollar wager that he could carry mail from St. Joseph to San Francisco in ten days; but this is said to be a myth. A. B. Miller, the firm's business manager, an old plainsman, bought the fleetest horses he could find, and engaged eighty riders noted for their light weight, courage and endurance. Some of them were yet in their teens. At its height, the system used four hundred and twenty horses, four hundred station men and assistants and one hundred and twenty-five riders.

The course was to lie between St. Joseph, the end of rail and telegraph from the East, and Sacramento, which was connected by telegraph and fast stage lines with San Francisco. Advertisements in the St. Louis papers stated that

the letter mail will be delivered in San Francisco in ten days from the departure of the express. The express passes through Forts Kearney, Laramie, Bridger, Great Salt Lake City, Camp Floyd, Carson City, The Washoe Silver Mines, Placerville and Sacramento, and letters for Oregon, Washington Territory, British Columbia, the Pacific Mexican ports, Russian possessions,

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Sandwich Islands, China, Japan and India will be mailed in San Francisco.

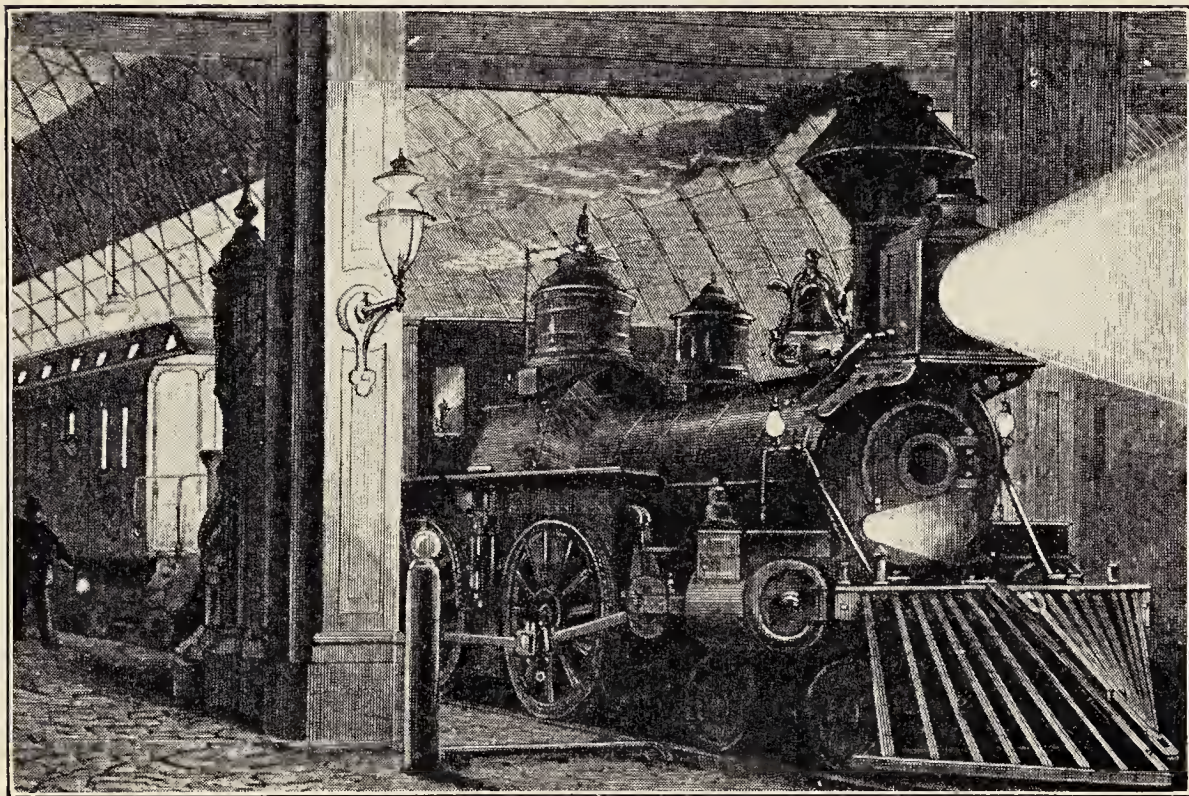
It was fitting that this most spectacular of all mail lines should be launched in a spectacular way. At a given hour on April 3, 1860, a cannon was fired at St. Joseph and another on a steamer in the river at Sacramento, and two riders whirled away on the longest test against time ever made by horsemen. Bands played, everybody wore his best clothes and made it a holiday, albeit there were many who did not believe that 1,966 miles could be ridden by relay horsemen in ten days. There is a dispute as to the name of the first man to gallop out of the Pike's Peak Stables at St. Joseph that afternoon. Some say it was Johnny Frey, twenty-year-old hero who was later slain in the Civil War; some Henry Wallace, but the best evidence seems to show that it was Alexander Carlyle, who, strangely enough, died not long afterwards of tuberculosis. He galloped down the slope to the ferry, which was ready to move at the moment his horse's hoof touched the deck. On the other side, the village of Elwood gave him a cheer, and he vanished across the prairie in a cloud of dust.

The first man to start east from Sacramento was Harry Roff, riding Manager Miller's own horse, Border Ruffian. The mail was brought through on the very first trip in the required time, with a few minutes to spare. Each rider covered from seventy-five to one hundred and twenty-five miles, changing horses every ten or twenty miles. As the rider neared the lonely relay station, the tender would have a fresh horse saddled and bridled. The rider unbuckled his saddlebags, pulled his pony to its haunches, leaped to the ground and into the waiting saddle, pausing, perhaps, if he had a moment to spare to gulp a cup of water, and then was off again. Two minutes was the time allowance at the relay stations, but in times of stress the stop was less than a minute.



From "The Story of Our Post Office," by Marshall Cushing

THE PONY EXPRESS; THE RELAY



From "Harper's Weekly," by permission of Harper & Brothers

THE FIRST FAST MAIL SPECIAL TRAIN LEAVING GRAND CENTRAL STATION, NEW YORK, 1875

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The riders dressed according to their own taste, but the usual costume included a buckskin hunting shirt, cloth trousers, high boots and cap or slouch hat. They carried a pair of Colt's army pistols, sheath knife and at first a Spencer carbine, but this was soon discarded as an unnecessary weight. The saddle and bridle were made as light as possible. The *mochilas*, or saddlebags, had a hole in the front center which fitted over the saddle-horn. They had four pockets or *cantinas*, one in each corner, so that one on each side was in front and one behind the leg of the rider. Three of these pockets were locked and opened en route at the military posts and at Salt Lake City, and under no circumstances anywhere else. The fourth contained the way mail, and each station keeper had a key for it; it also contained the waybill or time slip on which the arrival and departure of rider were noted. Before going into the pockets the letters were wrapped in oiled silk to preserve them from dampness. No more than twenty pounds of mail might be carried by any one rider, but this limit was rarely reached. The carrying fee was originally five dollars on each half-ounce letter, plus the United States postage; but this was later reduced to \$2.50. A few copies of eastern newspapers were printed on very thin paper to be sent to California by the Express; but this was only a passing whim.

Some of the feats of these lion-hearted youths (whose remuneration, by the way, was four hundred dollars a year and board) deserve a larger page in history than they have been given. No medieval knight was ever more courageous nor faithful to a trust than they. Several of them were killed by Indians or desperadoes while on their runs, but seldom was the mail delayed long, even by that. Again and again they outran or fought their way through hostile bands. More than once a pony was disabled en route and the rider had to walk five or ten miles to the next station, carrying the bag; but that lost time was usually made up. Consider,

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for example, the nerve required for the job of Theodore Rand. His run was from Box Elder to old Julesburg, one hundred and ten miles, through a dangerous Indian country; and throughout the whole history of the Pony Express he covered that stretch both ways at night and in all seasons. His scheduled time was ten miles an hour, but when late, he often clattered through the darkness at a twelve-mile average. What reader would like to try that?

When Jim Moore left Midway station, halfway between St. Jo and Denver, on June 8, 1860, his bag bore important government dispatches marked "urgent." He rode thence west to old Julesburg, one hundred and forty miles, fleet horses being given him all the way. At the end of his run he found other important dispatches going to Washington, and the rider scheduled to go eastward slain in a fight a few hours before. With only ten minutes' rest, Moore started back, and completed his round trip of two hundred and eighty miles to Midway in fourteen hours and forty-six minutes, or at an average of more than eighteen miles an hour.

Two of the most famous of the Express riders were Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill Hickok. Cody began riding a route when he was only sixteen. Once, after covering his run, he found that the next rider had been killed, so he rode that man's route, eighty-five miles, then returned over both to his own starting point, three hundred and twenty-two miles, without rest. Jack Keetly in the same manner doubled back over two men's stages between St. Joseph and Seneca, doing three hundred and forty miles in thirty-one hours. He rode the last five miles asleep in his saddle. But "Pony Bob" Haslam made perhaps the longest ride on record when he found the terminal station of his run burned by Indians and the stock tender and the next rider killed. Through a day and a half beset by perils, seeing Piute signal smokes from every peak and more than once pursued by war parties, he rode one hundred and ninety miles and doubled back over

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the route, finishing his three-hundred-and-eighty-mile run at Virginia City but little behind time.

The ten-day schedule of the line by no means represented the best that these wild horsemen could do. When government mail marked "Rush" was given them, they nearly always broke records. Time and again the bags went through in nine days or less. President Buchanan's last message reached California in seven days and nineteen hours from St. Joseph, and President Lincoln's inaugural address bettered that time by two hours, covering the last ten miles in thirty-one minutes. This line, instead of aiding the South, was of immense service in holding California for the Union. Messages from the State Department, from Secretary of War Cameron and General Scott in Washington to Governor Downey of California or General Sumner, in command of troops at San Francisco, bear the routing, "By telegraph to outer station, thence by Pony Express and telegraph." California letters and news items start off with, "I hear by Pony Express—", "The latest news by Pony Express is—", "The Pony Express of to-day brings disquieting news—", and so on. For seventeen months of that critical period, this was one of the country's most important lines of communication.

But in the fall of 1861 the blighting hand of progress sounded the first tap of the death knell of the romance of the old West. In October a telegraph line was completed between Omaha and California, and the Pony Express, after an unforgettable career of one year and five months, passed out of existence. It had crippled its backers financially; they had spent seven hundred thousand dollars on it and collected only five hundred thousand dollars; and this, together with other unfortunate investments, forced them to sell all their holdings, which now passed into the hands of the new giant of western transportation, big Ben Holladay.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CIVIL WAR AND AFTERWARDS

Messenger of sympathy and love,
Servant of parted friends,
Consoler of the lonely,
Bond of the scattered family,
Enlarger of the common life.

CHARLES W. ELIOT AND WOODROW WILSON

THE disruption of postal service caused by secession began nearly three months before the first shot was fired on Fort Sumter. On January 11, 1861, Florida passed the order of secession, and a few days later her militia at Pensacola seized the Navy Yard and invested Fort Pickens, preventing any member of the garrison from reaching the city post office so that he might communicate with Washington. The Postmaster-General, in a proclamation on January 21st, recited these facts and declared the post office at Pensacola abolished.

On the same day the senators from Florida withdrew from Congress; but a day or two later one of them, Mr. Yulee, went to the Post Office Department and requested to see or be served with a copy of the order discontinuing the Pensacola post office. The request was politely refused by an official, and Mr. Yulee jocosely promised that gentleman a hangman's rope in the near future.

During all that winter southern Congressmen utilized their franking privilege in spreading propaganda for secession, planning the seizure of government property, the organization of military companies and the distribution of arms. Southern postmasters began looking into the mail of

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those suspected of abolition sympathies, and certain northern postmasters, especially those near the border, became equally inquisitive regarding the mail of supposed "copperheads."

A provisional constitution was adopted by the Confederate states and a president and vice president inaugurated in February. President Davis, in setting up his governmental departments, had no little trouble in inducing some one to accept the portfolio of the Post Office, for the reason that no one he consulted felt sufficiently familiar with its duties. Two men had already refused it when he offered it to Judge John H. Reagan of Tennessee, a veteran of the Mexican War, whose father had fought in the Revolution; and Reagan refused twice before finally agreeing to take over the job.

Reagan was an excellent choice. He knew nothing of postal affairs, so he looked up the names of several southern men in the Post Office Department at Washington and wrote to them, offering them good positions under the Confederacy if they would help to organize the department. All but two accepted; and when they came to Montgomery, they brought with them, by Reagan's direction, a copy of the Postmaster-General's latest annual report, copies of every form in use in the department and postal maps of the southern states. Most of the stationery and supplies for the new department were purchased in Washington, the balance in New Orleans.

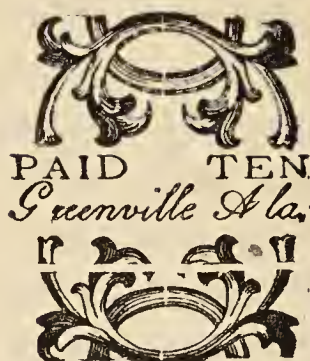
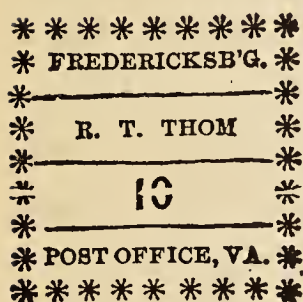
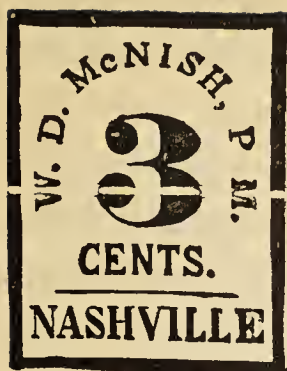
Reagan's next move was to open a postal school in Montgomery, all employees of the new department being expected to attend every weekday evening from eight to ten. As to the general organization, postmasters and contractors in the seceded states were retained on the job if they wished to stay. All postmasters and other employees were instructed by Reagan to render their accounts and pay all moneys to the United States authorities as heretofore un-

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til the Confederate postal system was fully organized. Judge Reagan, like many another in the South, was still nursing the belief that the separation from the Union might be "peaceably effected." But railway mail clerks and other employees began quitting their cars and offices, frequently without notice, and United States postal service in the disaffected territory became more and more impracticable. Finally, in May, Reagan issued a proclamation, stating that the Confederate Post Office Department would take over the service in the seceded states on June 1st; and as if in response to this, Postmaster-General Blair, in a general order, formally ordered the cessation of United States mail service throughout the South on May 31st.

The United States reports showed that for several years the post-office system in the seceding states had not been paying its way. To cope with this disquieting condition, Reagan ordered drastic retrenchments. He asked the railroads to accept a fifty per cent cut in their pay for carrying the mail, to which they agreed. He raised the letter rate to five cents per half ounce; unnecessary and competing mail routes were discontinued, and the number of trips on others was cut down; the franking privilege was greatly curtailed. Under this regimen, the administration of the Post Office became one of the most successful achievements of the Confederate government. Its operations were greatly hampered, even thrown into chaos at times by the invasion of Federal armies; but in spite of these troubles, it showed a net income over expenditures for every year of its existence.

With the opening of hostilities, the first great problem on both sides was taking care of the mail for the soldiers, most of them undisciplined and homesick, all clamoring for news from home and apt to break bounds like wild colts if their wants were not supplied. The armies had not yet set up their own post offices, and cities and towns near the



From Scott Stamp & Coin Co., New York

PROVISIONAL POSTAGE STAMPS OF VARIOUS CONFEDERATE CITIES
IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CIVIL WAR

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camps were swamped by mail. The office at Springfield, Illinois, for example, an easy-going town of nine thousand population, suddenly found itself called upon to serve 100,000 soldiers. There were only five employees in the post office, and for months they could get no additional help. By working daily from 4.30 A.M. to 11 P.M. this little force succeeded in keeping the office from being totally buried under the avalanche of letters.

The situation was even more serious at Cairo, which was a troublesome bottle-neck for transportation from north to south. In the early winter of 1861-1862, when Grant was preparing for the Fort Donelson campaign and the "river navy" was about to open the long struggle for the Mississippi, Cairo became one of the most important post offices in the country. The little office, about fourteen feet square, was full to the ceiling with mail, the station platform was stacked with bags, and it is asserted that at one time there were forty carloads of mail on sidings. The service was at a standstill. The postmaster, an inexperienced political appointee of only a few months' service, was completely bewildered and begging Washington for help. The naval and military commanders added their appeals to his, pointing out that at such a critical period it was necessary to keep the men in good spirits and discipline, otherwise there would be many desertions. At length a large force of men was sent down from the Chicago office, a two-story building was seized as temporary quarters, and within two weeks the mail was tolerably well sorted.

Later on, pretty efficient postal organizations were established in the main armies, that of the Army of the Potomac being especially efficient. Every regiment in the field had a postmaster, who received all mail and saw to its distribution, as well as selling stamps and money orders to the soldiers and forwarding their letters. Each regiment had a postboy, who carried the mail to brigade headquarters.

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There the mail of the different regiments was bunched and sent to division headquarters, whence it went to corps headquarters and then to the agent of general headquarters, who forwarded it by railroad, or by wagon to the nearest rail shipping point. The mails coming back to camp were no small matter, for the folks at home sent newspapers, magazines, books and other things beyond enumeration. At times when the roads were bad, the handling of the mail was a terrific job, and many trips might have to be made to move all that was lying at some concentration point; but for the sake of the men's morale, strenuous efforts were made to deliver it.

There were postmasters loyal to the Union in the border and mountain states—West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri—whose situation was particularly difficult. In theory they supposed they were still in the Federal service; but the government could give them no mail, and some of their offices remained in a state of suspended animation for three, four or five years. In the case of Jasper Workman, the postmaster at Bald Knob, West Virginia, there was added an instance of the occasional official stupidity which oppresses the little fellow. Workman had been postmaster for six years, receiving only a small commission. In the early days of the war, Confederate irregulars swooped down upon his office, took his stock of stamps, amounting to \$16.06, as well as other booty, and kept the postmaster and his brother prisoners and bound to each other by ropes for twenty-four hours. Workman remained loyal to the Union and at the close of the war was "reappointed" postmaster. Two years after his reappointment, he began drawing a salary; and out of his first pay check the department deducted the \$16.06 for stamps of which the enemy troops had robbed him!

Larger border towns, such as Nashville and Knoxville, had checkered experiences. Sometimes they received mail

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only from the North, sometimes from the South. Tearing up railroad tracks, a favorite army method of annoying the other side, was highly detrimental to mail service; and as first one army, then another, secured possession of the city or some of its railroads, the mail from one quarter or another was cut off. When the Confederates held Nashville in the fall of 1862 and their General Bragg was advancing northward, threatening even Louisville and Cincinnati, southern Kentucky and Tennessee received no northern mail; but when Bragg was driven back past Nashville to Murfreesboro and then to Chattanooga, northern mail service was again established in most of Tennessee. Parson Brownlow, the militant Unionist of Knoxville, whom the Confederates in 1862 had sent into the northern lines, with instructions not to come back, now reappeared in Knoxville in November, 1863, and began reissuing his paper, the *Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator*. His only northern news came usually through the mountains from Kentucky by mails brought on horseback, and when printed, was two or three weeks old. He had many northern subscribers, but could not send them his paper from Knoxville because of poor mail facilities; so he had a northern edition printed (several days late) in Cincinnati. Many of his east Tennessee subscribers had to send or go in person to his office for their papers. By January, 1864, the Federals were pretty thoroughly in possession in Tennessee, and mails were going through to Memphis and Chattanooga. A northern dispatch from Chattanooga late in the month says, "The Nashville & Chattanooga road is in prime running order, and the mails are arriving daily."

During these troublous times many people in those border districts afflicted by the armies resorted to medieval methods and sent their letters by friends or trusted adherents of their own cause. Northerners in the far South and southerners in the North once in a while had opportunity to sneak



*From "Photographic History of the Civil War" by permission of
Review of Reviews Co.*

A FEDERAL ARMY POST OFFICE IN THE FIELD BEFORE PETERSBURG,
AUGUST, 1864

A tent, with a portico of pine boughs

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a letter through in similar fashion; but it was a hazardous enterprise for both sender and carrier. The attitude of some military commanders towards such letter carrying is seen in the order of General Burnside, then Commander of the Department of the Ohio, in 1863, promising death not only to the carrier but to the writer of letters sent thus secretly, "without discrimination as to the character of the letters or mail"—an order which appears unnecessarily severe.

An interesting development of the war was the mail runner, whose business it was to carry letters between soldiers and their families at home. Two men who engaged extensively in that practice were Captain Absalom Grimes and Robert Loudon, both of Missouri. Captain Grimes's self-told story was recently published.* Missouri was largely southern in its sympathies, and sent many men into the Confederate army; but the northern forces secured almost complete possession of it early in the war, thus cutting off its Confederate soldiers from their homes almost as effectually as if they had been serving in a foreign land. Grimes, a Mississippi River pilot, an early chum of Mark Twain's, conceived the idea of keeping these worried boys in touch with their home folks. He therefore asked several ladies in various towns in northeastern Missouri to collect letters from soldiers' families and bring them to him. With this batch in a carpetbag, he made his way southward in April, 1862, posing as a civilian on business, of whom there were many passing to and fro on boats and railroad trains with a freedom which seems amazing to us to-day. Grimes reached the Missouri troops in the southern army around Corinth without mishap, distributed his letters, and waited two or three days for the men to write replies. In fifteen days from the time of leaving St. Louis, he was back with a load of mail to distribute to kinsmen.

* *Absalom Grimes, Confederate Mail Runner*, New Haven, 1926.

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Thereafter, for more than a year and a half he carried letters by the thousand. Bob Louden joined him in the work, as did four or five daring young ladies, who passed to and fro on boats and trains, sometimes with the letters in their baggage, sometimes in their clothing. Their voluminous ruffled skirts were arranged to carry as many as a thousand letters, the hoops holding them in position and preventing their weight being betrayed.

Grimes's service soon extended over most of Missouri and Kentucky. Eight or ten women, working out of St. Louis, collected and delivered letters all over the state, posing meanwhile as corset and hosiery saleswomen, by arrangement with certain St. Louis firms of southern sympathies, who always backed them up when inquiries were made. Grimes's name soon became known to the Federal authorities, and at times from one thousand to two thousand dollars reward was offered for him, dead or alive. No fiction could surpass the real story of his adventures. At least twice he donned Federal uniform, thus technically clinching the case against him as a spy. Once he aided his comrade, Bob Louden, to escape from prison at Columbus, Kentucky. He was three times captured and twice escaped; once by lifting the floor of his makeshift prison in Cairo, and later, after being sentenced to death, by tunneling under a wall in St. Louis. A third time he was captured, and again sentenced to death in the summer of 1864, but received a commutation and then a pardon from President Lincoln.

Men employed in postal work as well as in some other government departments were exempt from military service, and strenuous were the efforts on the part of some who abhorred the thought of soldiering to get into one of Uncle Sam's more peaceful jobs. Artemus Ward discovered this when he paid a visit to his old home at Bald'insville early in the war period:

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I hadn't no sooner sot down on the piazzzy of the tavoun than I saw sixteen solitary hossmen, ridin' four abreast, wendin' their way up the street.

"What's them? Is it calvary?"

"That," said the landlord, "is the stage. Sixteen able-bodied citizens has lately bought the stage line 'tween here and Scotsburg. That's them. They're stage drivers. Stage-drivers is exempt."

I saw that each stage-driver carried a letter in his left hand.

"The mail is hevvy to-day," said the landlord. "Gin'rally they don't have more'n half a dozen letters between 'm. To-day they've got one apiece! Bile my lights and liver!"

"And the passengers?"

"There ain't any, skacely, now-days," said the landlord, "and what few there is, very much prefier to walk, the roads is so rough."

In the West, mining went on and the stagecoaches ran, much as if there had been no war raging to eastward. When Atchison was the starting point of the Overland Mail coaches in 1861, Confederate troops were scattered all over Missouri, and they frequently menaced the California mails by tearing up the Hannibal & St. Joseph and Northern Missouri Railroads, firing into trains and burning bridges. It was common talk that the mails would have to be sent by a more northerly route; and in fact, they were carried several times through Davenport and Omaha. Atchison was mightily worried lest she lose her great stage line, but the government saw the advisability of keeping the Missouri routes open, so troops were sent to guard the railroads; and by the beginning of 1862 the Confederates were all driven out of the northern half of the state and travel was safe.

The stagecoach as a mail carrier reached its zenith in the sixties. The Overland Mail on the central route became probably the most famous stage line in the world. Mark Twain, Horace Greeley, Sir Richard Burton, Samuel Bowles

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and other celebrities were among its passengers. Greeley's legendary wild ride with the California stage driver, Hank Monk, is fondly remembered by lovers of western lore. Alexander Majors, one of the firm who controlled the Overland line in 1860-1861, forbade his men to drink, swear or gamble; and as a result, Sir Richard Burton asserts that he seldom saw a driver entirely sober, and that their fluency and enthusiasm in blasphemy were unrivaled. Mark Twain brings no such charges as these against them, but he was irritated by their pampered arrogance:

In the eyes of the station keeper and hostler, the stage-driver was a hero—a great and shining dignitary, the world's favorite son, the envy of the people, the observed of the nations. When they spoke to him, they received his insolent silence meekly, and as being the natural and proper conduct of so great a man; when he opened his lips, they all hung on his words with admiration . . . when he discharged a facetious insulting personality at a hostler, that hostler was happy for the day; when he uttered his one jest—old as the hills, coarse, profane, witless and inflicted on the same audience in the same language every time his coach drove up—the varlets roared and slapped their thighs and swore it was the best thing they'd ever heard in their lives. And how they would fly around when he wanted a basin of water, a gourd of the same or a light for his pipe! They . . . treated the really powerful *conductor* of the coach merely with the best of what was their idea of civility, but the *driver* was the one being they bowed down to and worshipped. How admiringly they would gaze up at him in his high seat as he gloved himself with lingering deliberation, while some happy hostler held the bunch of reins aloft, and waited patiently for him to take it! And how they would bombard him with glorifying ejaculations as he cracked his long whip and went careering away!

In the early days of the line the mail almost crowded the passengers out of the coach. Mark's description of the dumping of the newspaper bags as soon as the coach was

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well out on the prairie had already been quoted. He says that the conductor then arranged the letter bags (the coach was still half full of mail) so that the three passengers, all men, could lie upon them as upon a bed—which precisely suited Mark's lazy temperament. There they slept comfortably at night, save when the coach struck a bit of rough road, and they were hurtled from side to side and from front to back, passengers and steel-bound leather bags in inextricable confusion. Later, under Ben Holladay's régime, more coaches were put on, so that the passengers did not have to ride on the mail; but even then, the long journey across the plains and over rough mountain roads in the heat of summer or the bitter chill of winter was an arduous one; and a traveler who passed several of the stages on a summer journey said that the "heads and limbs of the jaded passengers were always to be seen sticking out of the windows in all sorts of dejected attitudes."

Holladay brought new and larger coaches from Concord, which finally carried fourteen or fifteen passengers, nine of them inside. He caused the road through the Sierras to be greatly improved, and had it sprinkled in dry weather. He added new stations (few people realized that the logs to build those on the plains often had to be hauled one hundred to one hundred and fifty miles) and endeavored to make the trip more comfortable. The "slumgullion" and the "ancient pork and hot saleratus bread, washed down with detestable, warm alkaline water," of which Twain and Greeley had complained, were replaced with somewhat better food—and charged for, too—fifty cents to two dollars a meal. Holladay's lines were operated at enormous expense, and it is said that only the discovery of gold in Montana and Idaho in the sixties saved him from ruin. He secured mail contracts from the government for branch stage lines to those territories; then pushed his Idaho line through to Oregon, and meanwhile threw out branches to the Colo-

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rado mining camps—Denver, Fairplay, Buckskin Joe and others. Within three years he was operating 3,300 miles of routes. D. A. Butterfield started a rival line from Atchison via Topeka and the Smoky Hill valley to Denver, and within a few months Holladay took it over.

A character out of a storybook was Ben Holladay, a bearded, dynamic giant with all the recklessness of that type of promoter-adventurer who had so large a part in the building up of the West. Once when in California an important matter called him to New York. Sending a day's notice ahead to his agents, he left the western terminus in a special coach, and with picked horses galloping at top speed all the way, he went through to Atchison in twelve days—nearly a week less than contract time!

Holladay had his own gun fighters to take care of desperadoes. Among them was the notorious Jack Slade, who once was shot and left for dead by brigands. He swore revenge on the gang, followed them relentlessly and eventually killed eleven of them. Indians were another great care to Big Ben and his successors. They harassed the Overland relentlessly from 1864 to 1868—Piutes in Nevada and Cheyennes, Sioux and Comanches on the plains. Between Salt Lake and the Sierras practically every one of the stations was burned at one time and another, and passengers and crew often had to fight for their lives. During the summer of 1864 the red men left a trail of blood and fire through Kansas and Nebraska, and the stages were stopped between Atchison and Latham, Colorado, for several weeks. Seventy-five eastbound passengers and a vast quantity of mail accumulated at Latham before service was resumed. In 1866 every station save one between old Julesburg and Fort Kearny was destroyed. During the following summer twelve stations, three coaches and much grain and hay were burned, thirteen employees killed, several

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passengers wounded and three hundred and fifty horses and mules stolen.

By that time the Union Pacific Railroad was pushing its way across the wilderness from both its termini, and the days of the Overland stage were numbered. Holladay had sold out to Wells, Fargo & Company in 1866 for one million dollars cash and three hundred thousand dollars in stock. That great concern, as the government pushed its mail service hither and yon through the mountains, became steadily less of a letter carrier and more of a conveyor of bullion, currency and other valuables throughout the entire West. The adventures of its drivers and shotgun messengers with banditti still furnish a rich fund of material for story-writers and the movies.

As the Pacific Railroad tracks were pushed nearer and nearer to their goal, the Overland stage, operating only between their outer termini, became correspondingly shorter. In May, 1869, the rails were finally joined in Utah, and the Overland was but a memory. Its old time of twenty to twenty-five days between New York and San Francisco was now cut to six days, fifteen hours and twenty minutes—a speed which we have not bettered much since then.

President Lincoln's Postmaster-General, Montgomery Blair, found time to think of other things than army mail and the extension of service into recaptured territory. He it was who first suggested to other nations the idea of the Universal Postal Union. It was during his incumbency, in 1863, that free city delivery was begun in forty-nine of the larger cities of the North. Strange as it may seem, it was not until 1860 that mail was carried at night between New York and Boston; and the following year between New York and Washington. It was also during those four years of civil war that the modern railway mail distribution system was begun.

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Since Revolutionary days it had been the persistent practice to do up all letters for a town, be it large or small, with a waybill in a brown paper wrapper, and address the wrapper to its destination. In earlier years this often put the mail at the mercy of postmasters such as that at a stagecoach junction point in Pennsylvania in the thirties, who puzzled over a Baltimore newspaper addressed to Hopewell Cotton Works, Pennsylvania (a real post office), and finally sent it back towards Baltimore with the endorsement, "Ye, who know where this is directed to, forward—I know not where it is—and B, D'd to it!"

Latterly, the increased volume of mail had caused the establishment of distributing centers, where mail was sent in large bundles to be reassorted into smaller parcels. For example, Louisville would send its mail for Wisconsin and Michigan in a large package addressed to Chicago D. P. O. (Chicago Distributing Post Office), where it was opened and the letters made into smaller parcels for Grand Rapids, La Crosse, etc. All letters for Indiana were sent to Indianapolis D. P. O., and for New England to Albany or Boston D. P. O., each office of this sort delaying the mail from twelve to twenty-four hours.

John L. Scripps, a newspaper man, was given the postmastership at Chicago in 1861. He knew nothing about the business, but there was an assistant postmaster, George B. Armstrong, who had been on the job for years and had ideas of his own. It is said that he was largely responsible for breaking the mail jam at Cairo during the following winter. It was about the same time that he propounded his conviction that the wrapping and waybilling of mail and the delay in distributing offices were uneconomic, that they should be abolished, and all mail sorted on the trains. The idea did not spring, full-blown, from his brain, for as we have shown, some railway mail sorting had been done in both England and America twenty-five years before; and our own

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Postmaster-General's report for 1859 shows that Canada then had railway post offices.

The turmoil of war prevented any immediate action on Armstrong's suggestion. During the following year William A. Davis did some sorting of the Overland mail on the railroad between Hannibal and St. Joseph; but not until 1864 was the system given a genuine trial according to Armstrong's ideas. He was then granted permission by Mr. Blair to test it "by actual experiment upon such railroad route or routes as you may select at Chicago." The first mail car approximating modern ideas was temporarily arranged for him by the Chicago & Northwestern railroad, and made its first run from Chicago to Clinton, Iowa, on August 28, 1864. The test was highly successful, and the Northwestern a little later built some cars from Armstrong's plans to run all the way to Council Bluffs. Cars were also put into service rapidly on the Burlington and Rock Island railroads; then the Pennsylvania and Erie, followed within two or three years by other eastern railroads. Armstrong was made superintendent of the Railway Mail Service in 1869, but lived only two years thereafter.

The transcontinental rail route was called completed in May, 1869, but for long afterwards there was an inconvenient gap between Omaha and Council Bluffs. There was as yet no bridge across the Missouri, and trains from the East stopped fully three miles short of the river. Thence passengers, baggage and mail (accompanied by the mail-car clerks) must go by stage and wagon three miles across the muddy bottoms on corduroy roads to the ferry. There would be from one to three two-horse wagonloads of mail, and in winter and spring a wagon not infrequently bogged down and had to be unloaded before it could be extricated. In mild weather the ferry was operated, and when it was extremely cold the wagons could cross on the ice; but there were many nights when the mail was left stacked on the

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river bank all night and the clerks buried themselves among the mail bags to keep from freezing.

In 1861 President Lincoln appointed a man named George S. Bangs as postmaster at Aurora, Illinois. When the railway mail service was well established under Armstrong, Bangs became assistant superintendent, in charge of a middle-western territory, and upon Armstrong's death in 1871 Bangs succeeded him as general superintendent. The rapid increase in population and in the mail business of the country, the rapid rise of Chicago as a metropolis, bred in Bangs's mind the idea that a fast train for mail alone was necessary between that city and New York.

He labored for a year or two with railroad heads and government officials before he saw his idea come to fruition. At length William H. Vanderbilt, of the New York Central, against the wishes of his father, the Commodore, agreed, after receiving promises of much business from the department, to put on a special fast train. Cars with the latest in mail-sorting devices were built and decorated for the purpose; and on the morning of September 16, 1875, the first fast mail special in America left the Grand Central Station. There were four postal cars and one "palace" car in the train, the latter for Mr. Bangs and other officials, not to speak of United States Vice President Wilson, who boarded the train at Albany and rode with it to Chicago. The mail cars were all painted white, with "The Fast Mail" in gilt letters on the side, the national coat of arms in bright colors above that, and below on each car, the name of a prominent state governor, the four honored being Tilden, Dix, Tod and Morgan.

To aid in swift separation of the mail, that for the towns reached earliest in the run was put into bags which Bangs had caused to be dyed a bright red. The train left New York at 4:15 A.M., and though delayed three times by hot boxes, losing twenty-five minutes at Elkhart from that cause,

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it reached Chicago at 6:27 next morning, eight minutes ahead of the scheduled time; but the strain of that last lap from Elkhart was so great that after reaching his goal the engineer fainted in the cab.

This train cut the time of the mail between New York and Chicago by twelve hours. The Pennsylvania Railroad, not to be outdone, worked furiously at changing four partly built baggage cars into mail cars, had them ready and gorgeously painted within two weeks, and started its own fast mail train. Three weeks after the New York Central ran its first special, the Post Office Department took a considerable quantity of mail away from that road and gave it to the Pennsylvania. A little later Congress cut the compensation for hauling the mail, and both companies promptly discontinued their special trains. Not until 1877 could government and railroads be brought together again and the fast mail reestablished.

America never took to the net which the English at first attached to the sides of their mail cars to catch bags while on the run. Instead, the iron arm was invented, which neatly and surely picks the bag from a crane beside the track. That there were in the seventies many small post offices which, although on a railroad, had no mail cranes, is proven by the accompanying magazine illustration of the period, in which a woman substitutes for the crane. It is explained that the engineer slackened speed considerably for her convenience.

On certain branch lines where all trains are "accommodations," no cranes are needed even yet, and a delightful, eighteenth century, unhurried calm prevails. The rush and strain of century-ago mail-coach days when bags were tossed to the ground and picked from the end of forked staves, these are unknown on a branch railroad in the South with which the writer has been familiar in recent years. There, while the train makes its five- or ten-minute stop at each station, the functionary who is at once postal clerk,

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express messenger and baggageman, swings off the car and strolls across the street to the village post office with the incoming mail bag, emerging after a time with the outgoing bag and pausing here and there to chat with acquaintances on his way back to the train. One fondly remembers another little line where a post office was some hundreds of yards from the railroad, and the postmaster himself brought the bag over. There was only a shed for a station, no agent, no telegraph operator, and the one train was often a half hour or an hour late.

"How do you know when to bring the bag?" we asked.

"Oh, I can usually hear her blow [whistle] at Estelle or Kensington," he explained. "That gives me ten to fifteen minutes to get here. If the wind's wrong, I jest come over a little past the time, and set and wait."

There was a great flood of immigration to the prairie states beyond the Mississippi just after the Civil War, and new communities were born so rapidly that the Post Office Department had much ado to keep pace with them, and in fact was often far behind. Postal efficiency was at a rather low stage at that time, anyhow. A western editor in 1870 is found remarking with bitter humor that "our town now has a tri-weekly mail service—the mail goes out one week and *tries* to come in the next." Whenever stagecoach lines were established (a newspaper item in 1869 informs the public that "Mr. Tisdale, the celebrated stagist, has put on a weekly line of coaches between Junction City and Scandinavia") the problem of the post was not quite so difficult, always provided the department had sufficient money to make extensions.

These up-to-date pioneers demanded the mail, and must have it. Often a new settlement or a group of them would employ a private mail carrier to connect them with the nearest post office until government service could be extended. Many lines were established, through "influence" or otherwise,

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which were far from being profitable or even self-supporting. It is related that a carrier on one of these lines was indisposed and employed another man to make a round trip for him, giving him five dollars for the job. There was just one village on the route, and it was forty miles distant. The substitute made the journey, over a muddy trail, fording creeks, ferrying rivers and spending one night en route; and when the postmaster at the end of the trail opened the mail bag, there dropped out nothing but one copy of Horace Greeley's *Weekly Tribune*!

During the first winter of the existence of Independence, Kansas, the man who brought the mail charged a little super fee of his own, varying at from ten to twenty-five cents per letter, depending upon the weather and the condition of the roads. One thoughtless new settler wrote an enthusiastic letter to a Boston newspaper regarding the new Canaan which he had discovered, and his next mail cost him two dollars—all inquiries.

Corruption, recklessness and incompetence were all too common in the years that followed the Civil War, and the Post Office did not succeed in keeping itself entirely free from the general reproach. A hint of the suspicions current regarding men in public office is seen in 1869 in one of those delicate little innuendoes of the sledge-hammer type so frequently found in western newspapers of the period:

Postmaster-General Randall, who was a bankrupt three years ago, is now worth nearly, if not quite, \$200,000. The deficiencies in the Post-Office Department have been remarkably large and steadily increasing during the past three years.

By deficiencies one fancies that the editor referred to what we would call deficits. Belief that there was a considerable laxity during Johnson's administration is seen in many such hints. Newspapers reported in May, 1869, that when the

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newly appointed postmaster at Indianapolis took over the office he found in the basement fifty-five bags of mail matter which had accumulated there during the previous winter. The editor of a paper at a mid-western county seat reported that he had sent out nine letters a few weeks previously, none of which ever reached its destination. "Even registering a letter does not make it safe." He added that in one mail brought to the town a few days before, there were twenty-seven letters for other places in almost as many states. The Southwest was in a particularly unsatisfactory condition, what with banditry, disaffection and poor communication. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, in October, 1870, published the following:

NOTICE

To our subscribers in Texas. Owing to the disordered condition of postal affairs throughout the State, we cannot hold ourselves responsible for money forwarded to us unless sent by means of Post Office Order, Draft or Express. It is unsafe to register letters. This applies only to Texas.

The general corruption of the seventies finally involved the Post Office in the star-route scandal, the greatest blot on its history. The star routes were and are, as most people know, stages or wagon lines for carrying bulk mails to country post offices not served by railroads or boats. In 1878 there were 9,225 of these routes, and their expense that year was \$5,900,000. A gang of Democratic and Republican politicians, plotting with a number of unscrupulous mail contractors, contrived to increase the remuneration on one hundred and thirty-five of these routes from \$143,169 to \$622,808. It was the old game that had been played as far back as Jackson's administration. On twenty-six of the routes the pay was raised from \$65,216 to \$530,319; and it was asserted that some of the lines did not carry more than three letters a week. Contracts were also granted on fraudu-

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lent and worthless bonds, of which inspectors reported that not less than thirteen thousand had been given the government. Exposure of the scandal was staved off during the closing years of Hayes's term, but with the coming of Garfield to the chair, prosecution of the crooks was begun. Thomas W. Brady, Second Assistant Postmaster-General, who was accused of being a member of the ring, endeavored to implicate the President himself in the affair, but unsuccessfully. To the lasting disgrace of American justice, none of the leaders of this infamous conspiracy could be convicted. In fact, only one man was sent to prison for the steals, and he was innocent!

The materialistic, even callous, state of mind prevailing in certain circles at that period is illustrated by an anecdote told by Lee Meriweather in his book *The Tramp at Home*. On the porch of a hotel in California he heard the following bit of conversation between a lady and gentleman:

"I have married since you saw me last," said the lady.

"Who is your husband?"

"You know him," was the reply. "Who was the biggest thief in the Star Route trials?"

"Surely you are not Mrs. X.?" exclaimed the gentleman.

"Oh, no," replied the lady. "I made a mistake. I meant who was next to the biggest thief?"

"Ah!" responded the gentleman. "Your husband must be Mr. Y."

"Right!" said the lady, and serenely continued the conversation.

The Post Office has gone a long way since those days, and no department of government has surpassed it in recent years in clean, efficient administration and service.

The purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 meant little to the Post Office Department for several years thereafter, but as the wealth of natural resources of that far-off terri-

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tory came more and more to light, the importance of its mail routes grew. To-day it is the show place of the service—the last frontier, the region of the greatest variety of mail transportation in the world. There one may see the mail carried by the railroad, by wheeled horse vehicles, by horse sleds, dog sleds, reindeer sleds, by men on foot and on snowshoes, by steamboat, gasoline boat, the white man's rowboat, the Eskimo kayak and the airplane.

Fully seventy-five per cent of the offices in the Alaskan interior, not located on a railroad, are supplied by routes traversing the mighty Yukon and its tributaries, some of them frozen most or all of the time, or over other bleak, desolate trails. Dog sleds are largely employed on the routes north of the arctic circle, where the ice endures the year around. One of these routes is that from Kotzebue to Point Barrow, six hundred and fifty miles, where temperatures frequently run from 50° to 60° below zero. And yet they tell us that Ned Nushunginya, one of the Indian drivers, wears thin khaki trousers throughout the season! And though he runs practically every step of that six hundred and fifty miles behind his sled, our pampered intellect cannot comprehend how even that exercise keeps him from freezing to death.

There must be stations at from twenty-five to thirty miles apart on the dog trails for shelter (for the driver, at least) at night, and as storage for food for the dogs, which consists largely of dried fish and tallow. There are from nineteen to twenty-five dogs in a team, and the average load they haul is two hundred and fifty pounds. The mail dogs wear moccasins in extremely cold weather and in the spring to protect their feet from sharp ice. One contractor used fourteen hundred moccasins in one winter. Each fall the dog and reindeer sleds must be rebuilt, worn and broken parts replaced, and joints relashed with rawhide.

The carrying of the mail in Alaska and northern Canada



From United States Post Office Department

MAIL BOAT CROSSING THE YUKON AT TANANA, ALASKA



From United States Post Office Department

DOG SLED MAIL, ALASKA



From United States Post Office Department

HORSE MAIL SLEDS, ALASKA

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calls daily for arduous toil, courage and endurance not surpassed in all the history of postal service. But not alone in Alaska are the picturesque and the heroic found in the operations of the United States Post Office Department to-day. If this book were not intended as a picture of the past rather than the present, much might be written concerning the bravery, the faithfulness and not infrequently the death on duty of those unsung heroes, the rural postman and the star-route carrier in the western mountains and in the North in winter.

Even in a territory not very difficult nor sparsely settled, rural postmen have been frozen to death in northwestern blizzards. Two of the most hazardous of all jobs are that of carrying the mail from Sandusky to the near-by islands of Lake Erie, and from Ellison Bay, Wisconsin, across the strait known as Death's Door to Washington Island in Lake Michigan. In winter these routes are operated across the ice, but when the ice is broken, the peril is great, boats being caught in the floating ice now and then and carried out into the lake. On the Lake Erie route there are iron-sheathed boats fitted with a sail, and with sled runners on the bottom, so that they can be run on either water or ice. Men have been lifted from these boats so covered with ice that they had to be cut out of their clothes. The Washington Island mail in winter when the lake is hard frozen is carried across Death's Door in a horse sled; but gales and currents sometimes cause sudden break-ups and great danger. The horse, sled and driver were once marooned on a great cake of floating ice, and only rescued by heroic and marvelous work on the part of the coast guard.

There is one route in Oregon which for a considerable distance lies along the ocean beach at the foot of cliffs. This stretch must be passed between tides. If by any delay the driver were caught by the tide, he would have to abandon his team and mails and climb the cliffs to save his life. There

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are star routes in the western mountains where the labor is colossal: that from Price to Vernal, Utah, for example, a stretch of one hundred and twenty-one miles, where, in winter, big four- and six-horse sleds fight their way through blizzards and huge snowdrifts, carrying as much as twenty tons of mail in a day. The carrier between Rocky Bar and Atlanta, Idaho, as he toils over his steep trail in winter on skis with one hundred to one hundred and fifty pounds of mail on his back, might be mistaken for Snowshoe Thompson crossing the Sierras in the fifties, and his work is scarcely less heroic. The two longest star routes are those from Two Harbors to Grand Portage, Minnesota, and from Midland, Texas, to Lovington, New Mexico, each one hundred and forty-three miles in length.

Two of the greatest improvements in the mail service in the past forty years have been the establishment of the rural free delivery and the parcel post. Both were discussed for years before they were finally put in operation. Postmaster-General Wanamaker first officially suggested the rural delivery in 1891, but it was fought in Congress for two years before consent was obtained to give it a trial. Then the amount granted was considered too small for a fair test and little more was done until 1896 when Postmaster-General Wilson was finally enabled to set three experimental routes in operation near his home in West Virginia. The worth and practicability of the service were so quickly demonstrated that nine months later there were eighty-two routes in operation in twenty-nine states. Within ten years after the R.F.D. was founded, 26,080 fourth-class, crossroads post offices had been rendered unnecessary by it and discontinued. To-day there are but few counties in the Union that are not pretty thoroughly covered by the service. To give just a few figures, Illinois has over seventy thousand miles of these rural routes, Ohio about sixty-four thousand, Iowa and Texas about sixty thousand each, Missouri over fifty-six

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thousand. The modern American farmer could not do without the R.F.D.

The parcel post is a still newer institution over which there was much head shaking before it was begun. But while in many cases it has proven a detriment to the country merchant, it has greatly benefited the people in general, and has come to be indispensable. One of its good works was the curbing of the power of the express companies who, it must be confessed, had grown pretty arrogant and greedy in their half-century's mastery of the light, fast shipping business.

CHAPTER XXII

THE AMERICAN POST OFFICE AND CITY DELIVERY

The official count shows that only two and one-half per cent of those who go to the post office transact their business and then go away. The other ninety-seven and one-half per cent do various things to cheer up the postmaster and make him earn his money.

BILL NYE

A GREAT man indeed was the American postmaster in the early days of the Republic! Very often he was the most influential citizen in the town or village. Frequently he published the only newspaper, his position gave him an excellent opportunity for getting the latest political and general news, and his connection with government, which he himself regarded very seriously, won him high respect. Postmaster Jeremiah Libby of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, for example, was looked upon as an authority upon the public opinion of his state and district. In 1787, after the Constitutional Convention had finished its labors, his opinion that the new Constitution "is very generally liked in this State," was widely quoted.

The American post office very early began to take on a character of its own. City delivery was authorized in this country as early as 1794, but for decades comparatively little of it was done. By this law the letter carrier received no salary, but was permitted to collect two cents on each letter he delivered. Citizens had the option of accepting this service or rejecting it by giving proper notice to the post-

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master. If they rejected it, however, the postmaster had the right to collect one cent on each letter handed to them at the window. All postage was so high that an additional fee for delivery was not popular; and in the cities there would be long queues at the delivery window every morning or after the arrival of a mail. The post offices opened at 8 A.M., and before that time there would be a number of errand boys from neighboring stores and offices in line, in order to get the mail as quickly as possible. Of course there was much scuffling and skylarking among them, a favorite jest being the sudden shoving of the whole line forward, so that the boy or boys nearest the window would be carried past it and have to go back to the foot. Normally, this sort of thing brought on at least one fight every morning.

In the three greatest cities of the country, Boston, New York and Philadelphia, the custom arose of putting the mail of the larger receivers in private pigeonholes or boxes. There has been no little discussion of the question who originated that purely American institution, the private mail box—a device found nowhere else than in America, and an object of great curiosity to Europeans. Some American is of course responsible for it, and Thomas Brown (later governor of Florida) in his memoirs, claims to have originated the idea when he was a clerk in the post office at Richmond, Virginia, in 1810. But Mr. Brown is obviously in error, for boxes were in use several years before that date.

Some have erroneously credited the invention to General Theodorus Bailey, who became postmaster of New York in 1804. But the records show that complaints regarding the practice of permitting certain favored clients to have "pigeonholes" for their mail were coming into the department as early as 1800. Postmaster-General Habersham that year ordered postmasters to stop the practice, calling attention to the provision for carrier service in the large towns, and

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saying that the private box would deprive the postman of a legitimate source of income. But a new Postmaster-General came in in the following year, and when General Bailey took over the New York office, in 1804, he introduced boxes again.

The history of the New York post office is interesting as a mirror of the rapid progress of America in general during the first half of the nineteenth century. Postmaster Bailey removed the office from 62 Broadway, corner of Liberty Street, which patrons had complained of as being too far uptown, to an old residence at 29 William Street, corner of Garden (now Exchange Place), where to-day huge office buildings seem to reduce the narrow streets to mere crevices. Here the postmaster and one clerk carried on the business in one room, about twelve by fifteen feet in extent. General Bailey and his family lived in the remaining portion of the house. There were one hundred and forty-four private boxes installed. The southern mail increased about this time so that two bags were required to hold it instead of the one which the clerk had formerly carried to the ferry in one hand. The office was closed from an hour to an hour and a half at noon, but the force could not keep abreast of the work, and William Coleman, publisher of the *Evening Post*, whose office was at William and Wall, often helped them out by taking a quantity of the newspaper mail over to his office and sorting it.

When yellow fever invaded New York, in 1822, the post-office business was removed in a wagon to Greenwich Village, which was strangely immune from the disease. By 1825 there was so strong a demand for larger quarters that the old Academy on Garden Street was leased and the clerical force increased to eight. There were now six postmen, their territory extending as far north as Canal and Catherine streets; but most patrons still preferred to get their mail directly from the office. Here nine hundred boxes were put in (call boxes, of course; lock boxes were not invented until



From the painting by T. W. Wood, N.A.

AN AMERICAN COUNTRY POST OFFICE

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later) and General Bailey was persuaded to erect a shed over the sidewalk, so that patrons might be protected from the elements while waiting for their mail, for the delivery window opened directly into the outer air.

There were other innovations that year. The Postmaster-General sanctioned an arrangement whereby some of the merchants had their mail delivered at a certain store, instead of going to the post office for it—the first hint at a system of branch offices. The department also sanctioned the placing of a letter box in a building in Chatham Square, from which carriers collected mail and took it to the post office. But the New York Chamber of Commerce's request for a branch office was met with the objection that there were legal and actuarial difficulties in the way which were insurmountable. The fact that Boston and Philadelphia merchants brought up the subject of private boxes again in 1824 shows that those cities had not ignored old restrictions on the subject as had New York. But no action was taken on the petitions, so the postmasters went ahead and put in boxes anyhow.

The Garden Street office proved inadequate more quickly than the old one, and in 1827 the basement of the new Merchants' Exchange on Wall Street was fitted up as a post office. Here there were no less than three thousand boxes. The general delivery was evidently almost ignored for several years, for the New York *Mirror* in 1834 is "glad to observe that a separate window has been allotted to applicants who have no boxes, and also one for females." There were now twenty-two carriers on the streets, going as far north as Houston and Fourth streets. But even in the business district there was only one delivery per day, and farther out, only three per week. This was true as late as the beginning of the Civil War.

The great fire in New York in 1835 destroyed the Merchants' Exchange and the post office, and the latter sought

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shelter for a time in the Rotunda, an art gallery and studio in City Hall Park. The records of the fire brought forth another curious phase of the mail service of the time, namely, the large credit business done by the postmen. Those in New York collected from their large commercial clients only weekly, monthly or quarterly, and at the time of the fire, some of these business men owed carriers as high as fifty dollars and even one hundred and fifty dollars. There was little insurance then; many of the business men were ruined, and from not a few of these the postmen never got their money.

It may easily be imagined that the city postmaster at that time was not extremely anxious to see the local delivery service greatly improved, for all the rent of the private boxes went into his own pocket. Until 1845 he had also the franking privilege, which included his private correspondence and his newspapers. The income of the postmasters in the three leading cities of the country became so large that in 1841 Congress passed a law, limiting a postmaster's earnings to five thousand dollars a year.

But the high cost of letters by government post brought about the rise of express companies, as already explained, and in the cities these private agencies came to do even local business cheaper than the government; for by regular mail you could not send a letter from your own house to your neighbor's for less than eight cents, and if there were two sheets in it, you suffered a double penalty. The "dispatch companies" slashed the rate heavily and made no charge for an extra sheet or two. Even after Congress had made cuts in postage in 1845 and 1851, the locals still continued to do most of the city business, because of their superior service; as witness a puff for one of them in *Godey's Lady's Book* for 1852:

BLOOD'S DISPATCH.—We are gratified to learn that the proprietor of this great public convenience has greatly increased its

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facilities, and that it is now making five post-office and four city deliveries daily. We are assured, also, that responsible and intelligent men only are employed as carriers, and upon each letter is stamped the date and hour of delivery. . . .

It will be seen that the Dispatch not only handled purely local letters, but would also collect your letters going to a distance and deliver them at the post office.

In 1850 the New York post office was (and had been for several years) located in the old Dutch Church building on Nassau Street, a place singularly unsuited to such a purpose. Here there were 3,228 boxes, "for which," said *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, "rent is voluntarily paid by individuals who wish to find their letters deposited separately from the mass. There are fifteen windows for general delivery," the writer goes on, "including that for ladies and that for newspapers," and after the arrival of a steamer or at the close of the day, long lines of people, including many tired clerks and workingmen, were to be seen waiting for a chance at one of the windows. Hunt drops another hint as to why the dispatch companies were prospering when he describes the difficulty of buying stamps. They had been in use for five years, and it had not yet occurred to the Post Office that their sale should be made convenient. They could be bought nowhere save at the post office, and were not for sale there at the windows. "No clerk can be trusted with the precious charge. You must go around by a back way, through an obscure door, up a narrow, winding stairway into a lobby having several doors, and when you find the one leading to the cashier's room, you may enter there and be allowed to purchase stamps!"

The introduction of stamps naturally brought about the placing on streets and elsewhere of boxes for the posting of letters. Street pillar boxes were first used in Belgium in 1848. In 1850 very handsome ones were erected on the streets of Paris, and London had plainer ones at the same

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time from which no less than ten collections a day were made! But in America, said *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in 1855, there were only a few "little tin boxes scattered about New York and perhaps some other cities, actually sometimes out at the door of a store in the street without lock or key." When they were inside a hotel, shop or house, "no responsibility attaches to the proprietor of the place. He doesn't know the letter carriers, they have no uniform, and any person that chooses can at any time go and open them, take out the contents or carry away the entire box without a question being asked." There was no sign or other indication from the street to show where these boxes were. They were inaccessible save during business hours when the store or house was open; there was no chance to mail a letter at night or on Sunday. "Then, when the place is found, the person depositing a letter must perhaps stumble over half the stock of a tallow chandler or green grocer to get at a little tin box hung up on the wall, that then presents no kind of security."

Not until after the Civil War did the "lamp boxes," as they were then called, because affixed to the street gas-lamp posts, come into use, the first one being erected, it is claimed, at Albany, New York, in 1865.

In 1860 Postmaster-General Holt declared (by virtue of the act of 1851) all streets, lanes, avenues, etc., within the corporate limits of Boston, New York and Philadelphia to be post roads, and notified all persons engaged in the private transmission of letters for fees that they were liable to prosecution unless they desisted. The local express companies all thereupon ceased business save Blood's Dispatch, which was disposed to fight for its existence, and actually continued to operate for some time in defiance of the government.

Not only in our larger cities before the days of free delivery, but again and again throughout our history has the

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long queue appeared, awaiting its letters at a delivery window; for mushroom cities still continue to spring up overnight on our soil, upon the discovery of gold or silver or oil or for other causes. At Leadville, when the boom was fairly under way in 1878, it was said that eight thousand people visited the general delivery windows daily. Early in the previous year there had been naught in the vicinity save a little country store and post office called Oro. Now ten men worked eighteen hours daily and still couldn't keep abreast of the flood. From three thousand to four thousand letters went out daily and six thousand were received, besides papers and packages. Sixteen hundred private boxes (no longer a perquisite of the postmaster, by the way) had been installed, and there were petitions for at least a thousand more. Yet the office was still in the fourth class, and the postmaster was receiving only about three thousand dollars a year, out of which to pay all expenses. He was losing money daily on the job, yet, said an admiring editor, "he is still the calm, courteous and patient gentleman. He is one in a thousand."

That postmaster could afford to lose a bit of money, for he was Horace A. W. Tabor, who, when postmaster and storekeeper at Oro the year before, had grubstaked two prospectors who discovered the Little Pittsburgh mine, one of the richest strikes in the Leadville field. By the end of 1878 Tabor was a millionaire, wearing six hundred dollar nightshirts. He built a gorgeous theater in Leadville, a big business block in Denver and dabbled in ventures elsewhere. He served a term as lieutenant-governor of Colorado. But strange the mutations in human fortune! Scarce fifteen years after his leap to prosperity, his fortune was swept away in the panic of 1893, and he completed a cycle by returning to his old employment, this time accepting the postmastership of Denver, which he held until his death, a few years afterwards.

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Tabor's position in 1878 was duplicated forty-five years later by that of G. V. McDonald, postmaster of Smackover, Arkansas. In the fall of 1922, when oil was discovered near that village, its population suddenly rose from two hundred to ten thousand. Previous to that time the quarterly receipts of the office had averaged about one hundred and fifty dollars. Within a month after the strike, McDonald telegraphed the Post Office Department, "Office out of my control, letters arriving 5,000 to 7,000 daily; parcels post by the ton; cannot open mail any longer, no place to put it. Accept resignation." He was urged to stay on the job until something could be done, and he stuck until spring. By that time twelve assistants had been authorized, and the postmaster's salary raised from six hundred dollars to two thousand five hundred dollars. But such picayunes meant nothing to him any more, for he himself was now an oil magnate, and he insisted on resigning.

Space fails to tell of similar scenes at famous mining camps—Butte, Creede, Goldfield and Dawson, to mention only four—at Beaumont, Ranger, Burkburnett and other great oil bonanzas. And in Florida in 1925-1926, when there was nothing but a land madness to account for it, the queues were there again, waiting at the suddenly over-taxed post-office windows.

One of the liveliest bits of work ever done by the Post Office was that when the major portion of the old Indian Territory was thrown open to settlement in April, 1889, and an army of men, women and children swept across it like a tidal wave in a single day. The sites of the towns which later became the chief cities of Oklahoma—Guthrie and Oklahoma City—had already been located. A postmaster was sent to Oklahoma City on April 11th, and had difficulty in convincing the soldiers on guard there that he was not a "sooner" (a settler who had sneaked in ahead of time). At Guthrie an assistant superintendent of the Railway Mail

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Service had arrived to open an office, but the postmaster, Dennis Flynn, did not get his commission until April 25th, three days after the opening.

During those three days the rush and pandemonium of those who had arrived and were still arriving was so great that no one seemed to give any thought to mail. But at four o'clock on the morning of the twenty-sixth Flynn began business, his office being in a tent. He had ordered some stamps and lanterns by wire from Arkansas City, had engaged four clerks, hastily knocked together fifty pigeon-holes for letters and paid ten dollars for a board twelve feet long by eighteen inches wide, to be used as a counter. The crowd discovered him immediately, and by 10 A.M. he was forced to call upon the troops for a guard to prevent his office being mobbed by three thousand anxious mail seekers. Four lines were formed, and men stood all day in a terrific dust and sand storm, waiting for their letters. At 9 P.M. the exhausted force was compelled to close, greatly to the chagrin of many who had waited for hours. Some of these slept at their posts, and before dawn next morning the postmaster and clerks were awakened by calls of "Hey, postmaster! You opened at 4 o'clock yesterday morning."

That was Saturday. Flynn swore in six friends as additional clerks: Two hundred dollars' worth of stamps arrived from Arkansas City and no more than ten cents' worth were sold to a customer. By 4 P.M. the stock was exhausted, and soon speculators were getting twenty-five and fifty cents for a single stamp. On Monday Flynn took on ten more clerks; and at 6 A.M. eleven men mounted boxes around the tent and began calling out the names on the letters, each taking a different section of the alphabet. Any letter not promptly claimed was returned to the tent. In this manner twenty thousand letters were handled during the day, and the letter Z was reached by 6 P.M.

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On Tuesday morning a frame building for the post office was begun, and by Thursday all the boxes were rented in advance. Friday morning the new office was open for business. Six delivery windows were cut in the wall—causing the building to be nicknamed “Flynn’s Livery Stable”—and all summer long six lines of inquirers waited at these windows for mail. In the first few days of these Oklahoma towns’ existence, paper and envelopes were about the scarcest of all commodities, and letters were written on almost every flat-surfaced object imaginable, detachable cuffs, collars and sections of shirt bosom being most favored, stamp and address on one side, the written message on the other.

When Nome in Alaska was booming in 1900 two postmen from the states who were chums obtained a ninety-day leave of absence and went up there on a vacation trip. Later they narrated their adventures in the *Postal Record*. The sight of the jam at the post office was too much for their professional consciences, and they went to a postal inspector who was on the spot and suggested starting a city free delivery. The inspector welcomed the offer, and after they had spent two or three days in making a census, they began their delivery. Nearly everybody offered to pay for it. The post office was open from 8 A.M. until midnight, and the postmen could not get in at those hours because of the crowd, so they reported at midnight and began sorting letters for morning delivery. Once when two steamers arrived on the same day they worked practically all night, starting out on their second delivery at 10:30 P.M. and finishing at midnight; but as it was midsummer, still broad daylight and the streets crowded, the task didn’t seem so bad.

It was difficult to keep track of the addressees, for scores of them moved every day. The quantities of mail sent from these boom towns to the Dead Letter Office was enormous.



From "Harper's Weekly," by permission of Harper & Brothers

POSTMISTRESS, AT A SMALL STATION WHERE THERE WAS NO MAIL
CRANE, HOLDING THE BAG TO BE CAUGHT BY A PASSING TRAIN (1875)

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One day at Nome a certain man ordered mail delivered at his tent. Next day when the carrier came around the tent was gone, a frame shack was nearly completed and a grocer's stock of goods was in the street, waiting to be moved in.

"Where's So-and-so?" asked the postman, naming the predecessor.

"Oh, he's mushed on," replied the grocer.

"Why, he told me yesterday to deliver his mail here."

"Oh, that was yesterday! He pulled his freight for Council City this morning."

What a characteristic American is the village postmaster! One longs for space to tell all the quaint stories that might be told of his—or her, for a goodly percentage of such officials are women—eccentricities. And yet he, too, might recite a long tale did he but choose to relate some of the irritations he suffers from his patrons: the persistent and suspicious inquirer, for example, the kicker, the grouch, the one who, when there is a rush at the window, tenders a five-dollar bill in payment for a two-cent stamp, the box holder who does not call vocally for his mail, but stands and drums on the glass; the other one whose box is near the delivery window, and who just reaches through (unless there is a grating) and gets his own mail—and many others. There may even be still in existence people who ask credit until to-morrow for a stamp; he and she were to be found in an occasional small town not so many years ago.

Sometimes the postmaster is one of those old-fashioned, independent Americans, to whom departmental discipline and red tape are peculiarly galling. Such an one was that postmaster in Georgia some thirty years ago whose quarterly report was overdue, and who, after three or four notices had been sent, was threatened with dismissal unless he made an accounting. That threat at length drew the following retort:

Old Post Bags

DEAR SIR: I have received all of your previous letters regarding some reports you desire from this office, and I would have you understand, sir, that they have annoyed me very much, and further I will say that you need send no further communications whatever to me concerning those reports, as I don't intend to waste any time on anything of the kind or send any dam reports to Washington until I get through cutting my hay.

The Post Office was probably the first governmental service in either England or America in which women were employed. We have already mentioned the remarkable walking postwomen and the postmistresses of England. Women were occasionally found handling small post offices in this country before the Civil War. In 1869 President Grant even appointed a postmistress for so important a town as Leavenworth, Kansas. The story of her installation has perhaps its richest flavor in the telling by the *Junction City Union*:

Leavenworth has enjoyed a sensation over their post office. Monday morning the new postmistress, Mrs. H. P. Johnson, assumed the duties of the office, but the retiring postmaster, McDowell, and her, could not agree upon the price of certain fixtures of the office. The postmistress refused to pay, and some of the citizens offered to buy the fixtures and present them to her, which she also refused, whereupon the retiring postmaster emptied the mail upon the floor and took his cases out. The office was closed for one day. The newspapers howled terrifically and the public howled, charging the woman with incompetency and demanding her removal. We are not able to tell whether the woman is incompetent or not, and care less. We believe Leavenworth gave a bouncing majority for female suffrage. They are therefore the last that should complain. The thing is straightening out, though, and we believe the woman should have a chance.

Later there was a love affair between the Kansas City postmaster and the Leavenworth postmistress which, so patrons complained, disrupted the mail service.

The American Post Office and City Delivery

During the seventies many women were being made clerks in post offices and post-office departments on both sides of the Atlantic, and certain questions, possibly not without aid from men who saw their jobs threatened, were gravely raised: "Does the female sex possess the mental and physical qualifications necessary for the discharge of the duties of the postal service?" "Can the employment of women in the postal service, according to the present views of their moral and social position, be rendered consistent with the rules of propriety and the precepts of morality?" Fancy the conflict that raged over the subject; the letters written to the *Times*, the debates in the pubs and clubs! The question was of course never settled to any one's satisfaction; but women continued in increasing numbers to enter not only the Post Office but other departments of government as well. To-day they may sometimes be found carrying town and rural mail and even handling star routes.

The most famous postmaster in American history was Abraham Lincoln. In May, 1833, when he was a young man of twenty-four with no settled occupation, he was given charge of the post office at the tiny hamlet of New Salem, Illinois. It was rather astonishing for a Whig to be given a job by the Jackson administration, but Lincoln's political attitude was not extreme, and he was almost the only available man. His own comment on the action was that "the office was too insignificant to make his politics an objection."

Lincoln at that time was a partner in the firm of Berry & Lincoln, who owned a combination store and tavern, and the post office was theoretically located in the store; but Lincoln, like other pioneer postmasters, carried letters around in his hat, delivering them as he had opportunity, even going out into the country now and then for that purpose. Whenever he delivered a letter he stopped and

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visited awhile. He read letters for the illiterate and was often called upon to read a newspaper aloud and comment upon it to a deeply interested group. The mail arrived anywhere from biweekly to semiweekly, and the postmaster's duties were neither arduous nor lucrative. In fact, even the store took so little of his time and returned so little money that he was forced to piece out his living by helping in other stores in the village, by splitting rails, working in the mill and, finally, taking up surveying. When his own store was compelled to give up the ghost he was permitted to keep the post office in the store of a Mr. Hill. A letter written by him as postmaster is a commentary upon the business arrangements of the time:

MR. SPEARS:

At your request I send you a receipt for the postage on your paper. I am somewhat surprised at your request. I will, however, comply with it. The law requires News paper postage to be paid in advance, and now that I have waited a full year, you choose to wound my feelings by insinuating that unless you get a receipt I will probably make you pay it again.

Respectfully,

A. LINCOLN

A little more than three years after his appointment, the post office at New Salem was closed for lack of business; but Lincoln had by that time been elected to the Legislature, and did not mind the loss of the smaller job. It is said that the traveling auditor who attended to such matters then did not come around to settle with the ex-postmaster until long after the office had been discontinued. When he finally appeared in Lincoln's law office at Springfield and asked for settlement of the balance due the government, about seventeen dollars, Lincoln arose from his chair, crossed the room to an old trunk in a corner and took from it a cotton rag tied into a package with string. Untying it, he produced the

The American Post Office and City Delivery

exact amount of money demanded, indicating that he had held the sum untouched since the closing of the office.

"I never use any man's money but my own," was his laconic comment.

Another famous American postmaster was the humorist, Bill Nye. In 1882 Nye was at Laramie, Wyoming, publishing the *Boomerang* in an upper floor over a livery stable, becoming known for his humor, but as yet earning very little money by it. His friend, First Assistant Postmaster-General Hatton, asked him who would be the best available man for the postmaster's job in Laramie, which had just fallen vacant. Nye unhesitatingly recommended himself, and was appointed by wire. His letter of acceptance was commented upon even in London, and President Arthur laughed over it with Mr. Hatton. In part it ran:

MY DEAR GENERAL:

I have received by telegraph the news of my nomination by the President and my confirmation by the Senate as postmaster at Laramie, and wish to extend my thanks for the same. . . .

I look upon the appointment as a great triumph of eternal truth over error and wrong. It is one of the epochs, I may say, in the Nation's onward march towards political purity and perfection. I do not know when I have noticed any stride in the affairs of state which so thoroughly impressed me with its wisdom.

Now that we are co-workers in the same department, I trust that you will not feel shy or backward in consulting me at any time on matters concerning postoffice affairs. Be perfectly frank with me, and feel free to bring anything of that kind right to me. . . . Perhaps you do not think I know the difference between a general delivery window and a three-em quad, but that is a mistake. My general information is far beyond my years.

With profoundest regard, and a hearty endorsement of the policy of the President and the Senate, whatever it may be,

I remain, sincerely yours,

BILL NYE, P.M.

Old Post Bags

In commenting in the *Boomerang* upon his appointment the humorist alluded to one of the curious phenomena that haunt the post office:

Regarding the postoffice, we wish to state that we shall aim to make it a great financial success, and furnish mail at all times to all who desire it, whether they have any or not. We shall be pretty busy, of course, attending to the office during the day and writing scathing editorials at night, but we will try to snatch a moment now and then to write a few letters for those who have been inquiring sadly and hopelessly for letters during the past ten years. It is indeed a dark and dreary world to the man who has looked in at the same general delivery window nine times a day for ten years, and yet never received a letter nor even a confidential postal card from a commercial man, stating that on the 5th of the following month he would strike the town with a new and attractive line of samples.

We should learn to find such suffering as that, and if we are in the postoffice department, we may be the means of much good by putting new envelopes on our own dunning letters and mailing them to the suffering and distressed. Let us, in our abundance, remember those who have not been dunned for many a weary year. It will do them good, and we will not feel the loss.

In another place, describing the post-office pests, Nye mentioned "the boy who never got any mail, and whose relatives never got any mail, and they couldn't read it if they had, and if some one read it to them they couldn't answer it." Such folk are common around all village post offices. Some of them succeed in getting a bit of attention by writing to newspaper and farm journal advertisers for catalogues, booklets, and "information"; others have not even sufficient acumen to do that. The writer can vouch for the existence of a family in a small town in Indiana who not only sent a representative to the post office twice a day, but also to the express office at least three or four times a week, although they never during his several years'



From United States Treasury Department

THE MAIN POST OFFICE, NEW YORK CITY



From United States Post Office Department

UNLOADING A MAIL PLANE AT NIGHT

The American Post Office and City Delivery

knowledge of that office received anything whatsoever by express.

In spite of all his humorous flings at himself and at the job, Nye took his work seriously and handled it well. His letter of resignation was even better than his acceptance:

To the President of the United States:

SIR: I beg leave at this time officially to tender my resignation as postmaster at this place, and in due form to deliver the great seal and the key to the front door of the office. The safe combination is set on the numbers 33, 66, and 99, though I do not remember at this moment which comes first, or how many times you revolve the knob, or in which direction you should turn it first to make it operate. . . .

You will find the postal cards that have not been used under the distributing table, and the coal down in the cellar. If the stove draws too hard, close the damper in the pipe and shut the general delivery window.

Looking over my stormy and eventful administration here, I find abundant cause for thanksgiving. At the time I entered upon the duties of my office, the department was not yet on a paying basis. It was not even self-sustaining. Since that time, with the active coöperation of the chief executive and the heads of the department, I have been able to make our postal system a paying one, and on top of that I am now able to reduce the tariff on average-sized letters from three cents to two.* . . . One reform has crowded upon the heels of another, until the country is to-day upon the foam-crested wave of permanent prosperity.

Mr. President, I cannot close this letter without thanking yourself and the heads of departments at Washington for your active, cheery and prompt coöperation in these matters. You may do as you see fit, of course, about incorporating this idea into your Thanksgiving proclamation, but rest assured, it would not be ill-timed or inopportune. It is not alone a credit to myself. It reflects credit upon the administration also.

* Letter postage was reduced to two cents in 1883.

Old Post Bags

I need not say that I herewith transmit my resignation with great sorrow and genuine regret. We have toiled on together, month after month, asking for no reward except the innate consciousness of rectitude and the salary as fixed by law. Now we are to separate. . . . Tears are unavailing! I once more become a private citizen, clothed only with the right to read such postal cards as may be addressed to me and to curse the inefficiency of the postoffice department. . . .

In no other business and in scarcely any profession does one find such remarkable examples of long and faithful service as in the Post Office. The history of the department is dotted thickly with names of country postmasters who have served forty, fifty, aye, even sixty years and more. Probably the most amazing instance on record is that of Roswell Beardsley, who was appointed postmaster at North Lansing, New York, by President John Quincy Adams in 1828 and held the position until his death in 1903—seventy-five years! He served under twenty Presidents! John N. Van Zandt was appointed postmaster at Blawenburg, New Jersey, in 1866 and is still on the job, after sixty-two years of service. He may yet equal Mr. Beardsley's record. In 1924 the village of Westwood, Massachusetts, celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of its post office. During that century it had had but three postmasters, and they all of the same family, Charles H. Ellis, still in office, having been appointed in 1880.

In the department at Washington the service of the Lawrenson family was noteworthy. James Lawrenson began work there in 1819 and continued until his death, seventy-one years later. He administered the oath of office to twenty-six Postmasters-General, the last being John Wanamaker in 1889. He enjoyed the friendship of many Presidents and other distinguished men. His son, Richard S. Lawrenson, served in the department from 1862 to 1920—fifty-eight years.

The American Post Office and City Delivery

If it is urged that all these men were simply clinging to easy jobs, then what of the numerous gray-haired postmen whom one recalls as having carried their heavy loads over the hard pavements of our cities for thirty and forty years? Certainly there is something in the postal service which seems to breed a high type of loyalty, as well as efficiency.

CHAPTER XXIII

OCEAN MAIL

The swiftest harts have posted you by land,
And winds of all the corners kissed your sails
To make your vessel nimble.

SHAKESPEARE

IT was during the seventeenth century, when postal systems first began to take on a somewhat modern aspect, that the ocean courier service of various European nations, and especially those possessing foreign colonies, was greatly improved. The Spanish and Portuguese, who, between them, controlled the western continent from Cape Horn north to Texas and California, as well as most of the West Indies and other and more far-flung possessions, had of course a tremendous official correspondence to carry on. England, France and Holland, who were getting footholds in the West Indies, Africa and Asia, likewise had to call upon merchant and war vessels to carry many letters and documents. Wars were frequent and piracy perpetual. Even supposedly respectable vessels at times laid greedy hands on weaker craft without the excuse of war. That was why official mail was usually carried in leaden caskets, so that if capture were inevitable, it might be dropped overboard with a certainty that the enemy would never get it.

In 1690 England had eleven regular mail packet boats running to near-by ports: two to France, two to Holland, two to Flanders, two coastwise to the Downs and three to Ireland. About the same time a packet line to Spain was started. The boats sailed from Falmouth, in Cornwall, which soon became the home port for most of England's

Ocean Mail

packet ships. News from far countries reached Falmouth first and was known to all its citizens a day or two before government heard it at London. A lookout sat always on Beacon Hill, above the town, with battered telescope in hand, and as soon as he sighted an inbound ship, he hastened down and spread the news. He was then entitled to claim a shilling from every woman in town whose husband was aboard the ship.

The communications of the English, French and Dutch with India, the Malay Archipelago, China and Japan, the establishment of the curious postmasterless post offices at the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn, have all been mentioned in preceding chapters. Spain set up a regular monthly mail packet from Corunna to Havana in the eighteenth century, and from Havana mail boats ran every three months to Montevideo and Buenos Aires. To cover the expense of the service, the packets carried from Spain cargoes of wine, spirits, iron, hardware and manufactured products to sell in South America, and brought back from Argentina hides and tallow. The postal officials at Corunna, Havana and Buenos Aires handled these transactions for the Spanish treasury. Other and less regular boats ran to Vera Cruz, Cartagena, Porto Bello and other ports.

In 1810 the flame of revolt suddenly swept the western continent from Mexico to Patagonia, and within a few years Spain and Portugal had lost all their American colonies, which then set up posts of their own. For decades most of these were of a very primitive character, and in fact they are yet in some of the rural and mountainous districts. In 1880 out of sixty-five post lines in Venezuela forty-six were foot posts.

English, Spanish and Dutch packets were all armed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The old long brass nine-pounders with which the English packets were

Old Post Bags

armed were still being called "post-office guns" by old salts in very recent years. In time of war—which was most of the time for some of them—the packets were apt to turn privateer and capture enemy merchantmen whenever they felt strong enough, such prizes bringing in a pretty bit of ransom money for captain and crew. The captains' general instructions were, however, "Run away if you can, fight if you must, and if necessary, sink the mails." "Be sure to have weights ready to attach to the mails" was an oft-repeated instruction. English packets had to sink their letters not a few times during the War of 1812 when Yankee tars were proving themselves such tough fighting opponents.

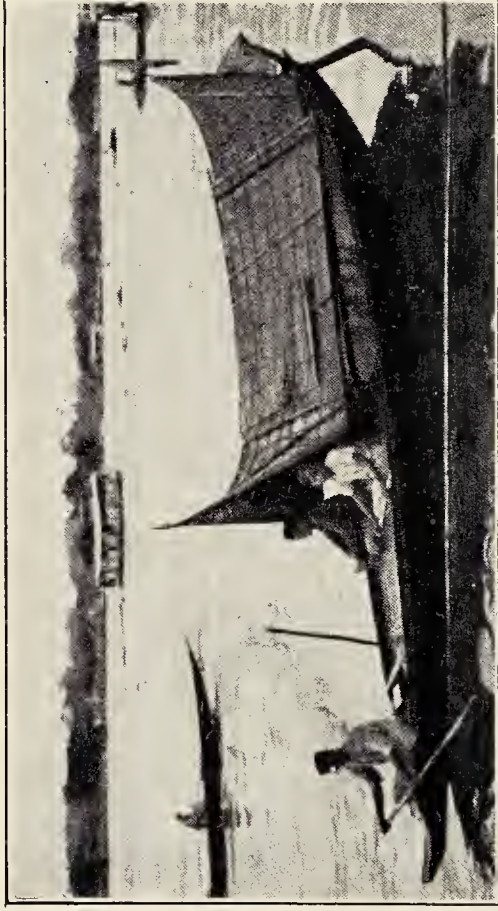
Sailormen's morals were not always of the highest in those days, and packet captains not infrequently did a bit of smuggling. Tea, coffee, liquors, silks, even salt were among the contraband stuff which they handled. To accomplish this they at times went to the extremity of landing at other ports than their headquarters, pretending that they had been driven there by contrary winds. Some of the captains were of the old rough, two-fisted type, too; one fancies that the mild reproof of the English Postmasters-General to one of them was more than justified, "We do think you may keep all your officers and sailors to strict duty without so rugged a treatment as is complain'd of."

In the eighteenth century English packets were carrying many private letters and not a little merchandise; and as even some of the government departments had to pay postage on their letters and packages, the revenue was large. One vessel's mail from the West Indies just after a raise in rates brought £629 in postage. But the rate increase promptly caused a falling off of business. That the service was not perfect is proven by a postal official's complaint to a ship captain that "we are concerned to find the letters brought by your boat to be so consumed by the rats that we cannot find out to whom they belong." Victualing arrangements sometimes in-



Harry A. Franck

THE MAIL FLIVVERS IN TROUBLE IN KOREA

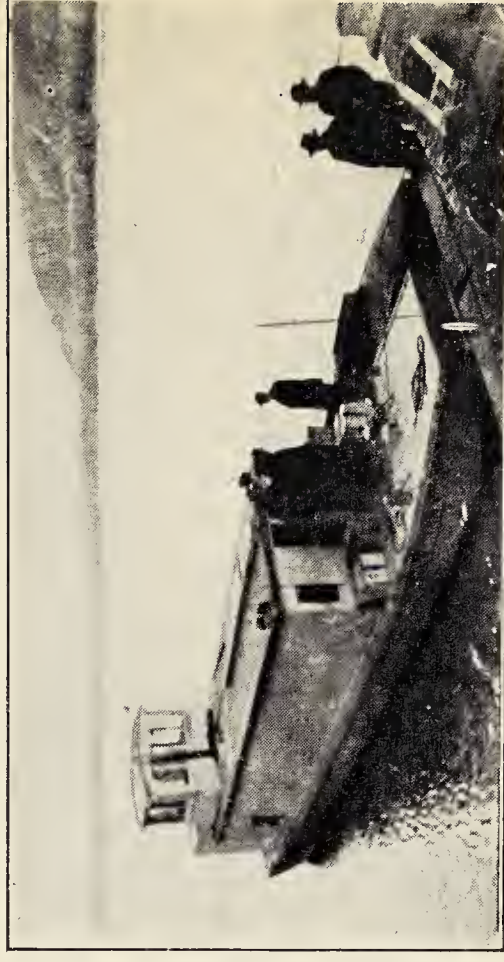


Official Tourist Bureau of Java

MAIL BOAT, SUMATRA



THE CATAMARAN MESSENGER, INDIA
The letters were carried in his headgear



GASOLINE MAIL BOAT, TANANA RIVER, ALASKA

Ocean Mail

terfered with the movements of the boats. The *Prince* was due to leave on a certain day, and upon a postal official's inquiring whether she was ready the answer came back, "No; our beer is not yet brewed."

On November 15, 1755, the British Post Office dispatched its first regular mail packet boat from Falmouth to New York; and a boat sailed every month from those two ports thereafter, with interruptions only during our Revolution and the War of 1812, until Samuel Cunard obtained his first mail contract in 1840.

Falmouth had become almost the leading port of England. Enormous sums of money passed through it—dollars, doubloons, milreis, half joes, louis d'ors, English money and bullion both gold and silver. A vault for its reception was cut in the solid rock of the hill on which the town lies; sheet iron was its lining, and the doors were of massive oak, strongly bound with iron. At regular intervals this treasure was sent to London by Russell's postal wagons, which were in operation even before the mail coaches, and which ran until the middle of the nineteenth century. Some wayfarers who could not afford coach fare traveled with the wagons, walking all day beside the horses, merely for the privilege of sleeping beneath the "tilt" or wagon cover during the night. Inside the wagon rode a man armed with pistol and blunderbuss, and the driver carried a horse pistol. When there was treasure in the wagon, a guard of soldiers marched with it, one on each side and two in the rear.

In 1808 there were thirty-nine packets running out of Falmouth. One went weekly to Lisbon; one to San Sebastian or some other northern Spanish port where communication with the English army then fighting Napoleon was easy; others went to the East and West Indies, Africa, Brazil, Surinam, New York and Halifax.

American communication with the European Continent was poor in the early days of our government. For a time

Old Post Bags

there was an irregular French packet, but usually all letters for Europe had to go via England, unless an occasional ship captain bound for some other port could be induced to take a bag to the postmaster there. A Congressional act of 1825 authorized our Postmaster-General to make arrangements with the postmasters of foreign countries for an exchange of mails, but little could be done under such an arrangement. Under McLean in the latter twenties somewhat desultory service was established from New York to Liverpool, Havre, Vera Cruz, Gibraltar and Lisbon. But McLean's immediate successors paid little attention to steamer mails, leaving England to seize the supremacy of the seas.

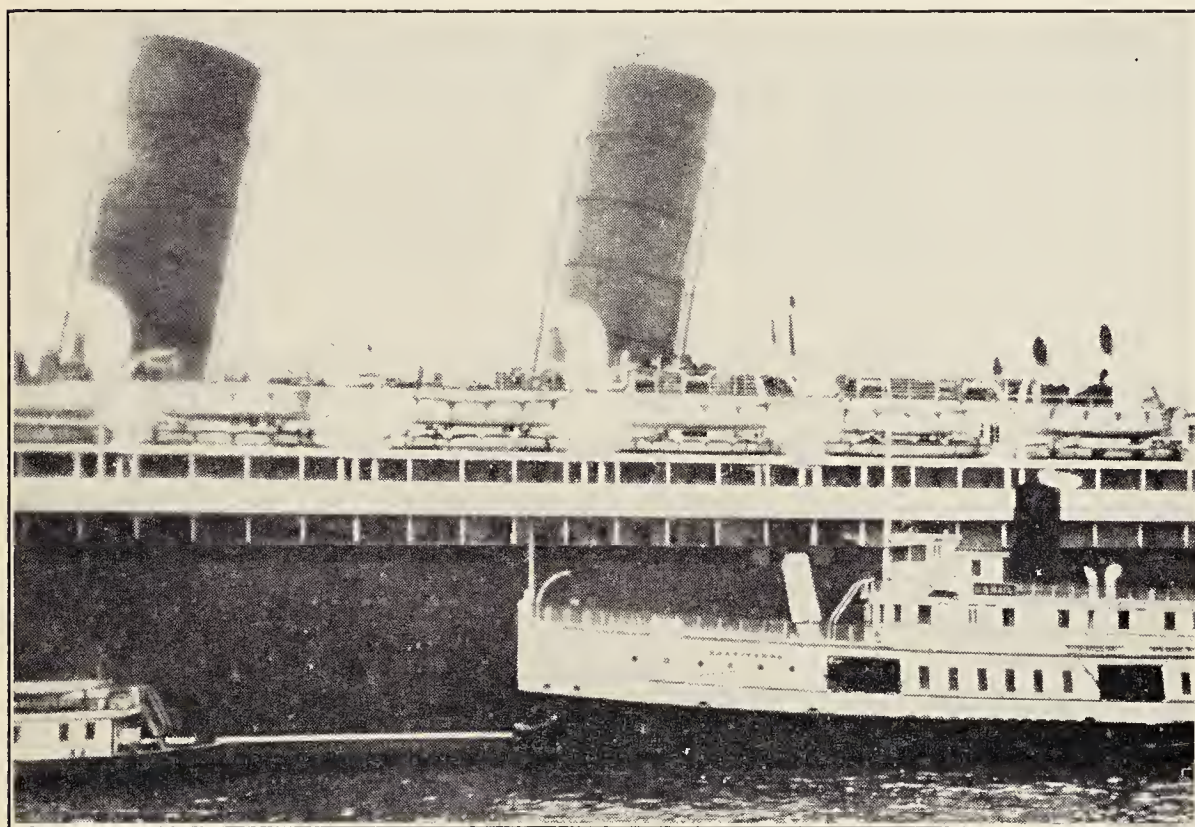
Not until 1844 was the existence of foreign postal administrations recognized by Congress, which then authorized our Post Office Department to treat with them rather than with local postmasters. Nothing definite was done, however, until 1847, when the first postal treaty was arranged with Bremen, followed two years later by one with Great Britain. There was no agreement with any country, however, as to the amount of postage to be charged, save that by precedent the ocean rate on a letter between America and England was a shilling, as it had been since 1710, and as it continued to be for another twenty years, then to be reduced to twelve and one-half cents. To other countries the rate depended on the captain or owners of the boat which carried the mail.

In 1839 Samuel Cunard, of Halifax, obtained a concession from the British government for an ocean mail service, and taking in two partners, Burns of Glasgow and MacIver of Liverpool, he founded the great steamship line which bears his name. In July, 1840, his first vessel sailed, crossing from Liverpool to Boston, via Halifax, in fourteen and one-half days. The first mail sorting at sea was done on these boats. America now began to pay dearly for neglect of the ocean, for English concerns obtained a grip on the



From the "Illustrated London News"

THE UNITED STATES MAIL STEAMSHIP "ATLANTIC," 1850



From United States Post Office Department

THE MAIL LIGHTER "PRESIDENT" IN NEW YORK HARBOR UNLOADING
MAIL THROUGH A CHUTE FROM THE LINER "MAURETANIA"

Seventy-five hundred bags in one hour and twenty minutes

Ocean Mail

business and have been supreme in the transatlantic service ever since.

Herr Kohl, a German traveler, on a trip from New York to Southampton in 1858, was astonished at the volume of mail handled by the steamers:

The so-called "Mail" consists of a long row of sealed letter-bags (each as big as a good-sized boa-constrictor) which are carried on board by some dozen men walking in single file. Although their pace is a trot, the operation lasts several minutes. One full bag succeeded another, and when I had counted forty, there were still more to come. When we see this, we understand why the steamship companies attach so much importance to the "Mail," why they use every endeavor to obtain the conveyance of the "Mail," why the Governments pay the Companies such large sums for the single transmission of the "Mail," and why the Companies which do not get a "Mail," find difficulty in competing with those that have succeeded in snatching away this privileged "Mail." I understand how it is possible that three or four hundred living passengers can sink into insignificance in the presence of the "Mail," in which many thousands of silent passengers lie hidden.

The mail has increased in volume since far more greatly than the passenger lists. Compare the more than forty bags which so amazed Herr Kohl with the 17,661 bags which were unloaded from the liner *Majestic* at New York on December 20, 1927. Six harbor mail boats with their crews, six mail chutes all working at once, one Assistant Postmaster-General, four assistant postmasters, one hundred and twenty-five men from the New York post office and sixty of the *Majestic's* crew toiled for the better part of a night at unloading that huge Christmas cargo of mail.

Only a few decades ago Americans and Europeans in certain remote quarters of the globe now considered rather easily accessible were compelled to wait months and even years for long-desired letters, if, indeed, they ever received

Old Post Bags

them. Letters took their chances on wandering vessels, as they did in the Middle Ages. Missionaries in the Pacific islands, for example, heard from England or the states only when some New Bedford whaler or chance trading ship which happened to have been given mail for them came along. Perhaps the vessel would come no nearer than some neighboring group of islands, and would entrust the mail to the good nature of some white or native trader, to be forwarded to the addressees when convenient. Thus the lonely gospel workers might not have a word from home for two or three years.

To-day all the seven seas are crisscrossed by the paths of steamers bearing mail; and from the ports at which they touch other and smaller vessels bustle away in this direction and that, each with its share of the precious cargo. Finally, the last scattering bags are delivered at village and trading post tucked away in bays and inlets or up lonely rivers, by small "put-put" launches, by Eskimo kayaks, by queer little tubs of the tropics with lateen sails, by Malay proas, by Chinese junks, by canoes, catamarans, dahabiyehs and other native species of craft beyond enumeration. In China one finds mail bags being ferried across a river on a raft; and from St. Kilda, a lonely isle eighty-two miles west of the larger Hebrides, off the coast of Scotland, mail has frequently been set adrift and floated to and from the larger islands in an inflated sheepskin bag attached to a wooden float. Because of rough water around St. Kilda, it has in stormy periods been impossible to approach it with a boat for weeks on end; and the fifty or sixty inhabitants, sometimes suffering for lack of supplies, used to commit their mail and their appeals for help to the sheepskin buoy when the wind was in the right quarter. With good luck, it would be washed up on the Hebridean shore two days later. It is asserted that mail was even returned to St. Kilda in the same manner.

CHAPTER XXIV

STAMPS AND LETTER-WRITING EQUIPMENT

The power of a wafer . . . to guard a letter, as it flies over sea, over land and comes to its address as if a battalion of artillery brought it, I look upon as a fine meter of civilization.

EMERSON

WE have already observed that M. Velaye, who started a city collection and delivery system in Paris in the seventeenth century, is believed to have put forth the first approximation of a postage stamp. His "*billets*" which, sold for one sou, were affixed to a letter to show that the postage was paid, had printed on them, "Post payé le—— jour du mois de —— l' an 16——."

Velaye's system did not last long, and nothing else resembling a stamp appeared until 1818, when postage labels were issued by the Kingdom of Sardinia in the form of sheets of writing paper, sold for fifteen, twenty-five and fifty centesimi and stamped with receipts in those amounts. These were used until 1836.

In 1830 Charles Whiting printed experimentally some stamped bands which he called "Go-frees," and which he suggested that the British government adopt for use in prepaying various quantities of printed matter. Four years later Charles Knight, not knowing of Whiting's idea, made practically the same suggestion. In that same year (1834) James Chalmers, a printer at Dundee, produced experimentally in his shop a stamp printed from type and gummed on the back. Chalmers had already won distinction twelve years before by suggestions for the acceleration of the

Old Post Bags

Scottish mail, which reduced the time between Edinburgh and London by forty-eight hours.

Rowland Hill had begun grappling with the problem of postal reform by this time, and he saw that a prepayment device for mail was necessary. He did not know of Chalmers's experiment, and credited Knight for giving him the idea of a postage stamp. He suggested an adhesive stamp in 1837, but when the postal reform act passed in



THE MULREADY "POSTAGE ENVELOPE," ENGLAND'S FIRST ATTEMPT AT A POSTAGE STAMP

1839 it was not at first adopted. The government advertised, inviting "all artists, men of science and the public in general" to offer proposals "as to the manner in which stamps may best be brought into use. Prizes were offered for the best design, and that of William Mulready, R.A., was the one accepted. His idea was not that of an adhesive stamp, but a letter sheet, on one side of which was a large allegorical design enclosing the address and representing the benefits of the circulation of letters throughout the world.

Stamps and Letter-Writing Equipment

The one-penny design was printed in black, the two-penny in blue.

This device brought upon itself an immediate storm of ridicule, and after only six months' use it was withdrawn, and those remaining on hand, about sixty thousand, were destroyed. Collectors now weep and cast ashes upon their heads when they think of that holocaust. The government next offered five hundred pounds for the best design for a stamp; but though a thousand or more designs were sent in none was considered satisfactory, and the Post Office finally designed an adhesive stamp of its own.

There was at first bitter opposition to the postage stamp. It would never work, said the protesters. Servants or messengers sent to prepay the postage would pocket the money and send the letters collect. (True enough, they sometimes did it!) "The stamp wouldn't stick; it would rub off in the mail." (Likewise true of some of the earlier ones.) "The postmaster would take the money from the sender and then fail to put the stamp on the letter." Not for a long time did it occur to any one that the sender of the letter might buy the stamp and stick it on himself.

Many were the stories that were told of the popular ignorance of stamps. One from *Chambers's Journal* was particularly good. A sailor from a man of war in the harbor went into a waterside post office and said:

"Do you know Bill Jenkins, A.B., of the *Racer*?"

"Not I. Why do you ask?"

"I wanted to give you a letter to him," producing an oddly folded epistle.

"Very well, the letter will be sent to him; but you must put a stamp on it."

"How the hell can you send a letter to Bill Jenkins if you don't know him?"

"Oh, no matter, I can send the letter, but it will cost you a penny for the stamp."

Old Post Bags

"Stamp!" he exclaimed, wonderingly. "Show me one."

A stamp was shown him. He turned it over slowly between finger and thumb, then shook his head and said, contemptuously:

"No, shiver me if I put Bill Jenkins off with a penny, for he has often spent a crown on me. Haven't you got anything handsomer than this?"

A twopenny stamp was shown him.

"Well, this looks decenter. But haven't you got anything better?"

The postmaster now produced a shilling stamp, and at last, Jack's face indicated approval. "All right," said he. "Put five of 'em on the letter. I'll never send Bill Jenkins less than five shillings' worth."

In 1853, thirteen years after stamps had been introduced in Britain, two tourists who were walking through northern Wales dropped into a little wayside inn for a drink, and finding themselves out of small change, offered the pay for the drinks, fourpence, in stamps. But the landlady refused them; she had never seen any and did not know what they were.

An interesting light on the evolution of writing materials is given in a recital of the four kinds of stamps prepared and sold by the English government in the forties. There were: (1) the regular adhesive stamp for letters; (2) the stamped letter sheet which the writer folded over and addressed in the old style; (3) stamped wafers for packages of newspapers and so on; and (4) the "stamped cover in which the letter is enclosed"—in other words, an envelope, a new fashion just coming into use. Here was another innovation against which the conservatives fought hard.

Envelopes were introduced into the United States from France in 1842 as "the latest European novelty." When first brought over, the flap was not gummed, but Yankee ingenuity added that touch soon afterwards. The new de-

James M. Buchanan
5 Cents.

Baltimore, Md.



Alexandria, Va.



St. Louis, Mo.



Millbury, Mass.



Boscawen, N. H.



New Haven, Conn.

From Scott Stamp & Coin Co., New York

LOCAL PROVISIONAL STAMPS USED BY VARIOUS CITIES BEFORE
NATIONAL STAMPS WERE ADOPTED

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vice was at first not greatly favored. It was considered a freakish thing which would not last. Tradesmen did not push the sale of envelopes, fearing that the business in seals and wax would be injured. For a long time the use of envelopes in private correspondence was considered as showing a lack of respect to the addressee.

But envelopes had of course come to stay. The letter sheet passed slowly out of use. In 1867 it was reported that England was making three million envelopes daily and France two million five hundred thousand. In 1870 one firm in Vienna was said to be turning out one million envelopes a day. It is a curious fact that even as late as 1894 a stamped letter sheet could be bought in United States post offices. It had the stamp and address space printed on one side; the other was for the letter. Along the right- and left-hand edges was a strip of gum, so that when folded over, it could be sealed. Just inside this gummed strip was a row of perforations, whereby the sealed strip could be torn off.

Postmaster-General Niles recommended the use of stamps in this country in 1840, immediately after they had been invented in England, but his suggestion was disdainfully ignored. Not until 1845 was their use authorized, and even then Congress made no provision for printing them. Consequently during that and the two following years the postmasters of numerous cities and towns in the country produced their own postpaid stamps, cut on wood, set in type or otherwise homemade and impressed with ink directly on the envelope. They were in effect a receipt from the local postmaster for the prepayment of a letter. Impressions of these stamps are now among the most highly cherished of all collectors' items.

In 1847 the department was finally empowered to issue national stamps, and all the postmasters' stamps were ordered destroyed. The first stamp was sold July 1, 1847;

Stamps and Letter-Writing Equipment

the first stamped envelope in June, 1853, and the first stamped newspaper wrapper in 1861.

Postmasters, steamboat and rail lines and traveling mail clerks designed their own canceling stamps or postmarks for many years, too, and the result was an indescribable medley of designs. Some were type set, others were cut on wood, rubber or metal. Some village postmasters merely cut a crude design with a jackknife on the end of a bottle cork. Steamboat lines took advantage of the postmark to advertise their businesses; while the postmaster was apt to use his initials, his lodge emblem or any other idea that happened to strike his fancy. Later the department adopted its own postmark, with the name of the sending town and the date of mailing. Austria, Prussia, Switzerland, Italy and the United States were the first countries to use this idea, all about the same time.

An interesting item in this connection is the fact that at Lodge, Virginia, an out-of-the-way landing on the lower Potomac estuary, two generations of the Chambers family for many years cut all the dies for the canceling and dating stamps used by the United States post offices, and still cut a considerable portion of them.

Frequently after stamps were introduced it was suggested in both Europe and America that they might be used as small change, especially in countries where silver and copper money was scarce. Early in the Civil War period in this country small coin, and in fact any metal coin was so scarce that Congress authorized the use of stamps instead, and likewise ordered an issue of "postal currency," slips of paper in denominations of five cents and upward which were redeemable in stamps at any post office. At the same time the little "shinplaster" notes for less than a dollar which had been privately issued in such quantities were prohibited.

This act brought about a great rush at the post offices to

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buy stamps. The sales of stamps at the New York office had averaged three thousand dollars daily; two days after the law was approved, they ran up to sixteen thousand dollars. Many ridiculous episodes resulted from this effort to make stamps serve as currency. A cartoon of the period



*From "Histoire de la Poste de Lettres,"
by Arthur de Rothschild*

THE CHILDREN'S STAMP EXCHANGE IN THE CHAMPS ELYSÉES, PARIS, 1878

pictures a citizen boarding a street car in a pouring rain, he himself soaking wet, and finding nothing in his pockets for car fare save postage stamps "of the sticky kind." Evidently stamps that were stuck together were not legal tender. Light tin frames were devised for holding the stamps, to prevent their getting mauled in the pocket. The postal currency passed out of use after the Civil War, but

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sixty years later—in 1923, to be exact—a woman astonished a clerk in the Syracuse, New York, post office by laying a sheaf of it, amounting to thirteen dollars, on his window ledge and asking to have it redeemed. The suggestion is now being made that this type of currency be brought back and used instead of stamps for the sending of small sums of money by mail.

Just when stamp collecting was begun it is impossible to say, but it was noticed in the fifties, when not even all the European countries were yet issuing stamps, and South America and Asia had scarcely heard of them. In 1860 the *Boston Daily Advertiser* (among others) referred to it as a “mania,” and stated that some collections now numbered three hundred varieties.

The comparisons of the different heads and legends adopted by the several powers of the world, makes the collections something more than a mere pastime, and gives to it something of the dignity and value of a collection of coins or medals. The stamps of Mauritius and Hawaii, we believe, are accounted among the most rare, and next to these may be named the Russian, for which, acting as amateur stamp broker, we should readily be authorized to offer half a dozen of the more common Italian, German or French varieties, and perhaps hundreds of English and American. The great variety of stamps ceases to be surprising when it is recalled that in each of the countries where they are employed at all, several denominations are issued, and some of them (as in the United States) there is old and new patterns, all of which are necessary in a complete collection. This elegant and curious “mania” is now chiefly indulged by young ladies, but we cannot tell how soon it may take possession of the more mature portion of mankind. We have already suggested that it is not beneath the notice of the most dignified literary institutions.

“Cornelius O’Dowd,” Charles Lever’s humorous commentator, grumbled over the fad in *Blackwood’s* three or

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four years later, which shows how quickly it had become a leading item in the topics of the day. In recent years the post-office departments of the world have catered to the collectors (and incidentally, irritated many commercial users) by issuing great numbers of commemorative and souvenir stamps, often of odd sizes and shapes. In fact, some of these issues have been intended for nothing else than collections.

To the postal authorities of the German states who assembled in conference at Karlsruhe in 1865, Herr Stephan, Prussia's great postmaster-general, submitted a design for an *offenes Postblatt* (open post card). The idea received little attention at the time, but in 1869 Dr. Herrmann, of Vienna, suggested it to the Austrian government, and it was adopted. From October to the end of that year, 2,900,000 of the cards were sold in Austria. Germany took it up during the following year; then England fell into line, and on the day they came into use, 575,000 cards passed through the London post office alone. On May 1, 1873, the United States issued its first post cards. Their popularity was instantaneous; sixty millions were sold the first year, and the department could scarcely keep up with the demand.

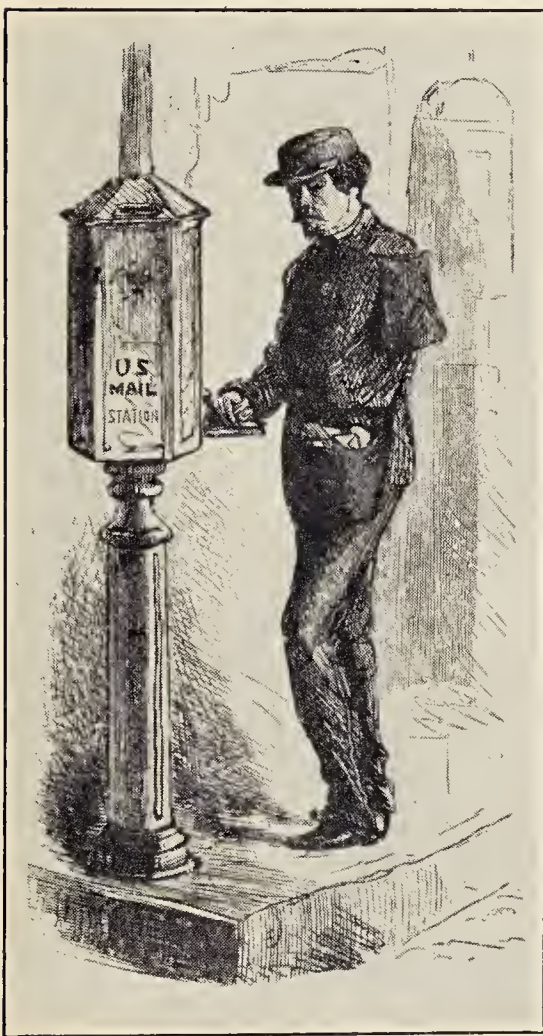
Although money orders had been sold in England since 1792 (the system from that time until 1839 being privately operated by a syndicate of clerks in the London post office, and then taken over by the General Post Office) there was no security method whatsoever devised in this country until 1855, and as quantities of money were sent through the mails, there was much stealing. On one occasion late in the forties it was announced that there had been 1,944 thefts from the mails in three years, this figure including robberies on the road, burglaries and pilferings and embezzlements, great and small, by employees. In 1855 the public prints declared that "stealing from the mails is rife. Mail depredations are so alarmingly prevalent that it is



Pillar Box, London, 1857



First Street Pillar Box, Paris, 1850



American Street-Lamp Box, 1870



From Compton's "Pictured Encyclopedia"
Self-Locking Box Now Used
in Europe and South America

MAIL BOXES

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with the greatest risk that money is ever entrusted to the Post Office." That year the registering of letters began, but as we have already been told, even this did not protect them in some cases. Not until 1864 was the first money order issued.

A century and more ago many families made all their own writing materials save the paper. Books of household hints always contained formulæ for ink and sealing wax. The wax was made mostly of resin or other tree gums, colored with cinnabar if red wax was desired, smalt or indigo for blue, orpiment for yellow or lamp black if one were in mourning.

When one recalls that until well along in the nineteenth century all ink was, as one might say, homemade, and by divers and sundry recipes, too, the wonder is that so many letters and documents hundreds of years old are still legible. There must have been some good ink recipes used, both publicly and privately. A favorite formula, as quoted in a newspaper a little more than a century ago, called for "1 part of green vitriol, 1 of powdered logwood and 3 of powdered oak galls." Usually such recipes specified "the best Aleppo galls." "The best menstruum," the adviser continues, "is vinegar or white wine, though for common use water will suffice." That last phrase explains why many old letters have faded. Other recipes included such ingredients as gum arabic, sugar and calcined sulphate of iron, and there was a deal of boiling, stirring and skimming to do. Meanwhile, other publicists called attention to the fact that Pliny, eighteen centuries before, had simply mixed lamp black with clear water and thickened it with a little gum. In a novel, *My Lady Ludlow*, of the early nineteenth century, a woman just engaged as a lady's secretary, says:

I had only time to make seven or eight pens out of some quills Farmer Thompson gave me last autumn. As for ink, I'm thankful to say, that's always ready; an ounce of steel fil-

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ings, an ounce of nut-gall and a pint of water (tea, if you're extravagant, which, thank Heaven, I'm not), put all in a bottle and hang it up behind the house door, so that the whole gets a good shaking every time you slam it to, and even if you're in a passion and bang it to, as Sally and I often do, it is all the better for it, and there's my ink, ready for use.

The mention of quills recalls the fact that pens were also homemade until less than a century ago. The large, stiff



TWO-CENT STAMP MAP OF THE WORLD

feathers of geese, swans and turkeys made the best pens, though for ladies who wished to write a very fine and delicate hand, the quills of the crow were used. To-day a kind of fine-pointed steel drawing pen is still called a crow-quill. Gallant gentlemen were often called upon to cut pens for ladies, as Nicholas Nickleby did for Miss Squeers; and always the first act in the ceremony was to ask the user whether she liked a hard or a soft nib. For a hard nib the quill was cut across pretty bluntly, while a soft nib was a long, slender point which let down ink copiously and caused many blots.

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Of course persons so important and so busy as legislators could not be expected to make their own pens. Hence we see advertisements such as the following in New York newspapers in January, 1820:

The highest price given for Country Quills at No. 178 Water street, next to the corner of Burlingslip, New York, by P. Byrne, Quill manufacturer and Pen Cutter to Congress.

To be sure, there was more than one pen cutter to Congress, just as there is more than one exclusive purveyor of orange marmalade to the King of England; but could P. Byrne have been the "impostor" so indignantly referred to through the newspapers that same year by another concern? With exquisite courtesy the miscreant's name was not made public; but he claimed to have cut sixteen hundred dollars' worth of pens in a season, when it seems he was only a small subcontractor.

Davis & Force, regular stationers of Congress in Washington, state that he never furnished a pen to Congress, and that his work for Davis & Force during the past year amounted to only \$40.50.

When the steel pen had been invented, Dickens, with a sigh of satisfaction, exclaimed in *Household Words* in 1851 that "in so far as the perfection of materials for writing and the facility of means for sending letters are concerned, we may have little to hope for in this country." How could he have foreseen a writing machine? The typewriter came less than thirty years after the above was written, but it was such an imperfect tool and old habit was so strong that it obtained little foothold for another twenty years. Who recalls the timid little single-column, one- or two-inch advertisements in magazines of the eighties of the only two

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typewriters on the market ; at least, the only two that advertised? Even in the nineties—not so long ago!—one recalls advertisements in which a business man is pictured tearing his hair over a hand-written letter from another captain of industry and saying, “Why the deuce don’t Jones keep abreast of the times and buy a typewriter?”

CHAPTER XXV

PATRONAGE, SPOILS AND REFORM

To the victor belong the spoils.

ANDREW JACKSON

We won, didn't we? And don't the winners always get the gravy?

ANDREW J. GILLIS, MAYOR OF NEWBURYPORT

IT is recorded that as soon as the Federal Government was set up there was a stampede of citizens who hoped to secure jobs under it. No sooner was Washington elected President than he was besieged by office seekers, and their importunities continued long after he was sworn in. Notwithstanding the fact that the government was so poor that its servants were miserably paid, the idea of holding office under it was dazzling, even to men of substance; and hordes of them turned away from established and paying trades and businesses to scuffle for jobs with insignificant salaries. "I cannot think it an object of your attention," wrote Postmaster General Pickering to such a man who besought him for the post office at Marblehead; "the compensation is so small. The office at Salem, which I should suppose much more considerable, yields to the postmaster but about a hundred dollars a year."

Osgood, the first Postmaster-General, and Pickering were overwhelmed by applications for post offices, sometimes a dozen or twenty in one small village; and both wrote toilsomely many long letters with their own hands to explain to the eager horde why every candidate could not be accommodated. Pickering's own niece, in urging the appointment of a friend, must have pulled out the tremolo stop,

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for her uncle, though feeling himself compelled to refuse her request, was deeply touched. "I know not when my sensibility has been more affected," he admitted in his reply. "Your words are more than plaintive. They breathe an air of melancholy which gives me pain. You plead for your friend in a strain which indicates an apprehension of disappointed hopes, and I frankly confess that the application excites some embarrassment"; and so on for several pages.

Some Congressmen protested vehemently in 1791 against allowing the President any voice in appointments, asserting that an unscrupulous man might abuse such power. As it turned out, there was something of prophecy in this claim; but can it be expected that Congress, for example, will be any less selfish than the President? Some foresaw that the Post Office working force would grow to great proportions, and many protested also against the Postmaster-General's retaining the mighty power of appointment, but it was not taken from him.

But notwithstanding the scramble for office, there was no thought during the first three administrations—those of Washington and John Adams—of the possibility that a change in the political complexion of the government might cause a general overthrow of job holders and the building of a political machine. It was supposed that a man could hold his position as long as he did his work well, behaved himself properly and kept on the good side of his immediate superiors. The Federalists excluded their opponents from office, but it must be said that they also insisted upon efficiency and fitness in a candidate. A modern commentator, Professor Fish, believes it "probable that the administration of public business bore a better relation to the business standards of the country under the Federalists than at any subsequent period." President Washington's three test questions regarding a candidate, "Is he honest? Is he



From "The Independent"

A CHUNK OF PORK

"By grass, Ezry, times is gettin' better in our me-trop-a-lus."

"Yew don't say, Cy?"

"Yep; the postmaster sez he's sold the third postage stamp this month."

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capable? Has he the confidence of his fellow-citizens?" are well remembered.

My friend [said he in speaking of a choice which he had to make] is welcome to my house and to my heart; but with all his good qualities, he is not a man of business. His opponent, with all his politics so hostile to me, is a man of business. My private feelings have nothing to do in the case. I am not George Washington, but President of the United States. As George Washington, I would do this man any kindness in my power—as President of the United States, I can do nothing.

It was Jefferson, that great Democrat and exponent of equal rights, who introduced the spoils system into the Civil Service. Always suspecting some chicanery, he wrote to Madison in 1796 his fears as to the Post Office Department:

I view it as a source of boundless patronage to the executive, jobbing to members of Congress and their friends and a bottomless abyss of public money. You will begin by appropriating the surplus of the post-office revenues; but other revenues will soon be called in to their aid and it will be a source of eternal scramble among the members, who can get the most money wasted in their states; and they will always get most who are meanest.

These remarks were to a considerable degree prophetic; but what gives the narrative its most sardonic point is the fact that the very scramble for "gravy," the very abuse of executive power which he pessimistically predicted, he himself precipitated as soon as he became President. He brought a new party, the Democratic-Republican, into power; and in 1802 his new Postmaster-General, Gideon Granger, inaugurated the "rotation-in-office" nuisance which has cursed public business in this country ever since. The administration consciences were very tender on the point, and Jefferson, Granger and others among their adherents wrote reams of

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letters to each other and to their constituents in an endeavor to prove that they were acting from the very highest motives, and that changes were necessary lest, as Granger shudderingly predicted, "the Republic expire at the feet of aristocracy."

There was particularly bitter feeling over some removals from office in Connecticut. To the Republicans in that state Granger wrote:

To remove people from the subordinate offices for a difference of opinion is both unjust and impolitic; unjust because the Deity and not Government gave man his rational faculties and the free use of them, and the elective franchise ought to be secure from party bars. Impolitic; because a wise Government would soothe, not irritate, because the contrary rule would change the Government from being the common father of the people and bring it down to the humble head of a party.

Compare this with his explanation to a discharged postmaster:

Knowing as I did that most of the officers under me had been in the habit of associating and corresponding as well on politics as on business with those lately in authority from whom the people had removed their confidence . . . it occurred to me that some removals would become necessary, as well to effect an equal participation and enjoyment of office by . . . Federalists and Republicans as to preserve and maintain confidence in the department.

"How are vacancies to be obtained?" asked Jefferson of the merchants of New Haven. "Those by death are few, by resignation none. Can any other mode than removal be proposed?" He had declared of the post-office system that he "feared its fidelity" and "would trust it with nothing important"; but with Demo-Republicans in the offices, it presumably became upright. Among those who fell under the

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ax were a number of Federalist postmasters who published newspapers. To one such unfortunate Granger pointed out that "the printer of a newspaper is not the most proper person to discharge the duties of a postmaster, owing to the jealousies which will exist." Admitting the possibility that postmasters might abuse their franking privilege or delay mail addressed to a competing publisher, it was a curious fact that no Republican postmasters were dismissed for fear they might fall into such temptations.

Washington, in his eight years as President, removed only nine persons from office; John Adams dismissed the same number—but none of these was because of politics. Jefferson discharged thirty-nine, Madison in his eight years removed only five, Monroe eight and John Quincy Adams two; and the last-named President remarks in one of his letters that he was bombarded daily and incessantly with applications for jobs. During the last year of Monroe's administration, when the position of Fourth Assistant Auditor of the Treasury became vacant, among the horde who scrambled for the place were five United States senators and thirty representatives.

Granger served through Jefferson's two administrations and five years of Madison's. In 1814 Madison quarreled with him over an appointment and he was dismissed. Madison's successor, Monroe, refused to interfere in any case with the Postmaster-General's selections, even when politicians pressed the latter so hard that he attempted to pass the matter up to the Executive. John McLean, who became Postmaster-General in 1823, wrote of him that "in the use of patronage Mr. Monroe was governed by those large and elevated views required by the interests of the country." McLean consulted him on several occasions regarding appointments, "but in no case did he intimate a preference for any one of the candidates whose names I laid before him. His answer was, uniformly, 'The law has

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given you the right to make the appointment; I shall be satisfied with your decision; do what the public interests require.' ”

Jackson was now rising rapidly in politics, and fought a hard battle for the presidency with John Quincy Adams in 1824. McLean was a Jackson man, yet Adams, recognizing his ability, continued him in office, and like Monroe, refused to interfere with his appointments, though McLean in a great many cases selected Jackson men. Adams was so vexed at this political bias that at one time he contemplated dismissing McLean, but the latter was able and faithful in fulfilling his duties, and Adams showed true greatness by retaining him. McLean all along stoutly denied that he had appointed any men because of Jacksonian leanings; but it was evident that he had a bit of Old Hickory's tendency to regard political disagreement with himself as indicating a deficiency either in honesty or intelligence.

That men were as yet a long way from a proper attitude towards public service is seen in the commissions issued during the 1820's, there being a phrase in them which reads, “to hold the said office of postmaster during the pleasure of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the time being.”

General Jackson was not yet inaugurated when the rumor spread that there would be many offices vacated soon. But no wholesale proscription had as yet occurred in the history of the government, and no one had any conception of the terror which was about to grip the capital and the larger cities of the land. Jackson's political creed, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, by no means meant that he favored plunder or graft, for he was thoroughly honest, according to his lights; but he was of opinion that a man opposed to him politically was very apt to be an enemy of the Republic, and should by no means be on the national pay roll.

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Of all the government departments, none offered such fine material for building a party machine as that of the Post Office. It numbered eight thousand local postmasters, scattered from Maine to Louisiana, and twenty-seven thousand employees. It was there that the new administration expected to reap its richest spoil and taste some of its sweetest revenge. But when McLean learned of the holocaust that was contemplated, his innate honesty forbade his being a party to it. As John Quincy Adams said, "He declined serving as a broom to sweep the post-office." Because of his excellent record, he would have been taken into the Cabinet had he consented to remain. It would not do to have him resigning by way of protest, so he was shifted to the Supreme Court bench, and William T. Barry, of Kentucky, a more thorough partisan, was put into the vacant place. Others of the new cabinet were quite ready to begin mowing down the unfortunates. In a few days chief clerks, collectors and surveyors of customs and others began to go. William Henry Harrison, minister to Colombia, who had been at his post only a few weeks, was recalled. Next, subordinate officials and postmasters began to drop, and petty officeholders became panic-stricken. Some had almost spent their lives in the departmental work and knew no other trade. A clerk in the auditor's office, fearing dismissal and poverty, cut his throat. Jackson, while he remained at Gadsby's Hotel, was beset day and night by job hunters. They filled the tap room and the hallways, and crowded into his private room. After he moved to the White House, they thronged the sidewalks around it and blocked the departmental corridors. By June 1st about three hundred postmasters had lost their positions, and hundreds of clerks in the larger offices were also dismissed when their new superiors came in.

This wholesale massacre caused a storm of protest, and the Jackson press and partisans found themselves on the

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defensive. Wait a bit, they urged, and all will be explained; do not judge harshly; such a mass of evidence will be laid before Congress as will startle the nation; these men have interfered with elections, they have abused their trust, they are "the President's enemies, persons against whom the voice of the people has pronounced a judgment of condemnation. [We are now quoting from the *Ohio Monitor*.] Public expectation is eager that these defiers of the will of the people, these calumniators of the people's candidate shall be one and all removed."

Samuel Swartwout, a New York politician, wrote to his friend, Jesse Hoyt:

I hold to your doctrine fully, that no d——d rascal who made use of his office or its profits for the purpose of keeping Mr. Adams in and General Jackson out of power is entitled to the least lenity or mercy, save that of hanging. . . . Whether or not I shall get anything in the general scramble for plunder remains to be proven; but I rather guess I shall.

He did. He got the collectorship of the Port of New York, and stole \$1,222,705.69 there in eight years. It was Jesse Hoyt's opinion that "there is a charm about bold measures which is extremely fascinating—it has given to General Jackson all his glory."

And then, as might have been expected, there was great dissatisfaction over the distribution of the spoils, and not a few of Jackson's supposed friends were alienated. "If the President pursues this course," grumbled one editor, "the party is ruined, and the sooner we begin to build up a new one, the better." Another declared that the appointment of so many personal friends and editorial partisans had aroused such feeling as he never expected to witness.

Through succeeding administrations one occasionally finds a village postmaster whose job was, like Lincoln's, too insignificant to arouse any envy, and so he continued to serve

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on, sometimes through several changes in governmental complexion, though doubtless expecting that every four years might be his last. It was John Stuart Mill's opinion that "rotation in office" is the chief evil of our governmental system; and Lord Bryce was scarcely less vigorous in condemning it.

After Jackson and Van Buren, the Whigs came back into power in 1841. Of course severe reprisals were expected, and all Democratic officeholders shivered in their shoes. But old General Harrison, the new President, was a pretty decent sort, and while some Democrats were dismissed, the carnage would probably not have been so great had he lived through his term. He retained Jonathan Coddington, the Democratic postmaster of New York, for example, because the latter was efficient and well liked by those whom he served; but, unfortunately, President Harrison lived only a month after his inauguration, and no sooner had his successor, Tyler, taken office than he dismissed Coddington and appointed a Whig in his stead.

Tyler was a partisan of less elevated sentiments than Jackson. Just when the assessing of officeholders for party expenses began, it is difficult to say; but one of the forms in which it flourished under Tyler was that of a campaign biography of himself which postmasters were expected to sell. They were "solicited" in a circular letter (franked, of course) to subscribe for "fifty or sixty copies," which would be furnished "at the low price of fifty dollars a hundred." This circular was accompanied by a note penned in the President's office by his son and secretary, which read:

PRESIDENT'S HOUSE, 1st Dec., 1843.

SIR: As it is considered of importance, in justice to the President, to circulate among the people the work spoken of in Mr. Abell's letter accompanying this, you will confer a favor on the undersigned by taking such measures for that end as Mr. A. suggests.

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Prompt attention and a liberal subscription will render your services still more useful.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN TYLER, JR.

Notice the veiled threat in the second paragraph.

It came to pass that every inauguration year found the hotels of Washington jammed with the job-hungry and their allies. "Orpheus C. Kerr" in 1861 said that every American citizen who could find it possible to do so seemed to think it his duty "to take up his abode in the capital of this agonized Republic and give the Cabinet the sanction of his presence." Parton, the historian, writing on another occasion, said that when a messenger from the White House was reported nearing the Capitol with a bunch of nominations, "the rush of men towards the Senate wing of the building was like the thundering tramp of buffaloes across a prairie." The "I-knew-him-when" brigade was always present, with no absentees save those who were bodily disabled. John Phoenix's friend, Timothy Flaherty, who sought a job during Pierce's administration on the ground that "he was a sergeant in Pirce's regiment and held Pirce's hors when he rared and throwed him" was a typical example. Orpheus C. Kerr, whose very nom de plume was a gibe at the national mania, wrote in April, 1861:

The city is full of Western chaps who look as if they had just walked out of a charity hospital, and had not got beyond gruel diet yet. Every soul of them knew Old Abe when he was a child, and one old boy can even remember going for a doctor when his mother was born. I met one of them the other day (he is after the Moosehimagunticook post-office), and his anecdotes of the President's boyhood brought tears to my eyes and several tumblers to my lips. . . . I tell you what, my boy, if Abe pays a post-office for every story of his childhood that's told, the mail department of this glorious nation will be so large that a letter smaller than a two-story house would get lost in it.

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When Andrew Johnson came to the chair, there were many rumors that he was leaning towards the Democrats; but Petroleum V. Nasby, stanch Democrat and aspirant to the job of postmaster at Confederate X-Roads, found him a great disappointment:

Our Dimocratic noosepapers are supportin Androo Johnson. They claim that his polisy is our polisy; that he is ourn and we are hizn. They are singin hosanners to him. What is it all about? In what partikeler hez Androo Johnson showed himself to be a Dimokrat? In the name of Dimocrisy, let me ask, "WHERE ARE THE OFFICES?" What is the politikle convickshuns of the wretch who is post master at the Corners, and who only last nite refused, in the most heartless manner, to trust me for postage stamps? . . .

After pointing out the pliability of a political party in catering to diametrically opposite sentiments in different sections of the country, he concludes:

Sich a variety uv principle,—a party uv sich adaptibility,—kin hev but one great central idee, on wich there is no diversity uv opinion, and to wich all other idees is subordinate. That idee is *post office!* and ef Androo Johnson could be got rite on that question, we'd care not wat else he required uv us.

General Grant desired to see merit rather than politics figure more largely in appointments; but he had no support in Congress or anywhere else; his idea was characterized as "utopian," and his efforts were more or less half-hearted. He appointed George William Curtis to draw up a plan for civil service reform, but he and Curtis could not agree, and the matter was dropped. Nevertheless, Grant caused much heartburning by some of his selections. Parton gives an amusing picture of an April day in 1869 when the President's secretary posted the list of new appointments in the Capitol, and the jam of breathless applicants around it was so great that the newspaper reporters could not get near it

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to copy it. Then disappointed candidates, "a score or more seeking each office," sought their Congressmen to demand explanations. And that evening "the 8.40 train for New York was packed with the most dejected, pitiful, profane and demoralized crowd that ever left this city."

Clark E. Carr, a postal veteran, in his book, *The Railway Mail Service*, tells a significant anecdote of a political appointee of the early seventies. W. H. Eddy, ward politician and horse trader of Chicago, popularly known as "Hoss" Eddy, while suffering temporarily from Fortune's frown, still had sufficient "pull" to obtain a job as a railway mail clerk, his run to be between Chicago and Burlington. He knew absolutely nothing about such work; there was only one clerk to a car then, and on his first trip he could not get the mail sorted. Never was there such chaos on a mail line. But "Hoss" claimed that he made a fair distribution.

When the engine whistled, I looked out to see how big a town we were going into, then poked into a bag what I thought was that town's share and put it off. For instance, Riverside is small, and I gave them about half a peck; Downer's Grove larger, and I gave them a peck . . . and when I looked out and saw Aurora, big as it is, I gave them a full bushel.

When the train stopped at Altoona, Eddy's eyes lighted on a farmer's wagon, with a superb span of horses, standing near the track. All else was forgotten but his love of horse-flesh; he sprang from the car and began a close examination of the team. While he was doing this the train pulled out and left him—hatless, coatless and with his mail key hanging at his side. Realizing that there was nothing else to do, he wired his resignation to headquarters, bought the team and that night was on the way to Chicago with them, where he later sold them to Potter Palmer "for a clear profit of more than a mail agent's salary in a year."

Hayes promised that merit should govern appointments—

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at which the politicians winked at each other. But Hayes really meant it, though, like Grant, he stood almost alone, opposed by all the leaders of his party save John Sherman, Secretary of the Treasury. The President fought pertinaciously for his principle, making appointments with a balance and high-mindedness for which he has been given too little credit; but in the end he was convinced that "legislation is required to establish the reform."

Charles Sumner had been an early advocate of the merit system, and Schurz, Curtis and other prominent men were now hammering at the subject. Several clubs and associations were formed during Hayes's administration to push the matter, but not until August, 1881, was the National Civil Service Reform League (which did more than all others to bring about a change) organized. George William Curtis, its chief mover, exultantly declared that "we have laid our hands on the barbaric palace of patronage and begun to write upon its walls, 'Mene, Mene.'"

Garfield did not do much for the movement, but his assassination by a disappointed office seeker gave it a tremendous impetus. His successor, Arthur, formerly a New York City spoilsman, became, as President, a warm advocate of reform. In his first message to Congress, December, 1881, he maintained that "original appointments should be based on ascertained fitness." He likewise warned his party that no office holders should feel obliged to make political contributions; and when Senator Pendleton, Democrat, from Ohio, proposed his reform bill, Arthur promised it cordial support. This act Ostrogorski in his *Democracy* calls "the Magna Charta of civil service reform." It provided for the appointment of a commission of three, not more than two of whom should be from the same party, which commission should aid the President in preparing rules for carrying the act into effect. "Open, competitive examinations" were ordered to test the fitness of applicants for public service

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employment in the departments specified. There were only three classes of workers put under the act at first; some in the postal service, some in the customs and some in the other Washington departments—a total of fourteen thousand out of one hundred and ten thousand, or less than twelve per cent.

But when Arthur left office there were 15,573 workers in the classified service. In 1884 there befell a change in the political complexion. Democratic politicians came into power with chops watering for spoil, but President Cleveland was determined to carry on in the fight for progress. In the infancy of the movement it was pointed out that the Democratic leaders and the Republican rank and file favored reform, while Democratic masses and Republican leaders were against it. But in later years more progressive leaders had arisen for the Republicans, and the party now appeared before the public as crusading for the abolition of spoils, a distinction which Cleveland was determined that they should not monopolize; though, as it was humorously said, he had a hard time of it, weaning his party away from "St. Jackson."

During Cleveland's first administration the railway post office and other departmental jobs were classified, to the number of 11,757 places. Under Harrison were added small free delivery post offices and other workers in the Indian Service, Weather Bureau, etc., to the number of 10,535. During Cleveland's second term a tremendous step forward was made in all government departments, and 38,961 persons were added to the classified list. In McKinley's four years there were only 3,261 additions, but under Roosevelt there were 34,768, including the rural free delivery and the fourth class postmasters. During Taft's single term no less than 58,868 places were added, bringing those under the merit system up to sixty-one per cent of the whole number of government workers. To-day the only employees in the postal service whose appointments are subject to political influence are the postmasters of the larger cities and a few high officials.

CHAPTER XXVI

FRANKING

DEAR MARY JONES:

Lady Griskin's butler, Mr. Crumb, having got Squire Barton to frank me a kiver, I would not neglect to let you know how it is with me and the rest of the family. . . .

Mrs. Jenkins, in SMOLLETT'S *Humphrey Clinker*

ONE of the great curses of the postal service has always been the tremendous burden of non-paying matter piled upon its shoulders by those who considered that they were entitled, *ex officio*, to free carriage, and were able to enforce their will. Of course the monarch, in the days when all courier service was theoretically the king's (though the country's taxpayers footed the bill) considered that he had a right to send by the post all his personal matter as well as that affecting the state; and if he, then his wife, his children, his cousins and his uncles and his aunts, all being royal, were certainly entitled to send their letters and Christmas gifts free. Next, there were the king's faithful and powerful ministers, who managed his government—some of whom actually did his thinking for him; why should not they be entitled to that small courtesy, too? And finally, when constituent assemblies grew powerful enough to take a hand in government, the mouths of some of their members likewise began watering for a taste of that sweet privilege.

It will be sufficient to consider the beginning of the franking evil in England, as typical of its development in most countries. It appeared there, as one might say, at the very Creation, that is, along with the parliamentary bill of 1660

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which first gave form to the postal system. The clause providing free transportation of mail for the members of the Commons was opposed by Sir Heneage Finch, who called it "a poor, mendicant proviso, and below the honor of the



A cartoon from "Harper's Weekly," 1860

MEMBER OF CONGRESS (*who franks his clothes home to Wisconsin and has them cheaply laundered*)

"Seven cotton shirts, three flannel, six pairs of socks, one collar, five handkerchiefs, three pair drawers, two linen coats—that's all, I guess; and as the mail's just closing, that must do for to-day."

House." The Speaker, Sir Harbottle Grimstone, refused for some time to put the question, saying he felt ashamed of it. But evidently a large majority were already licking their chops over the prospect, for when the vote was taken

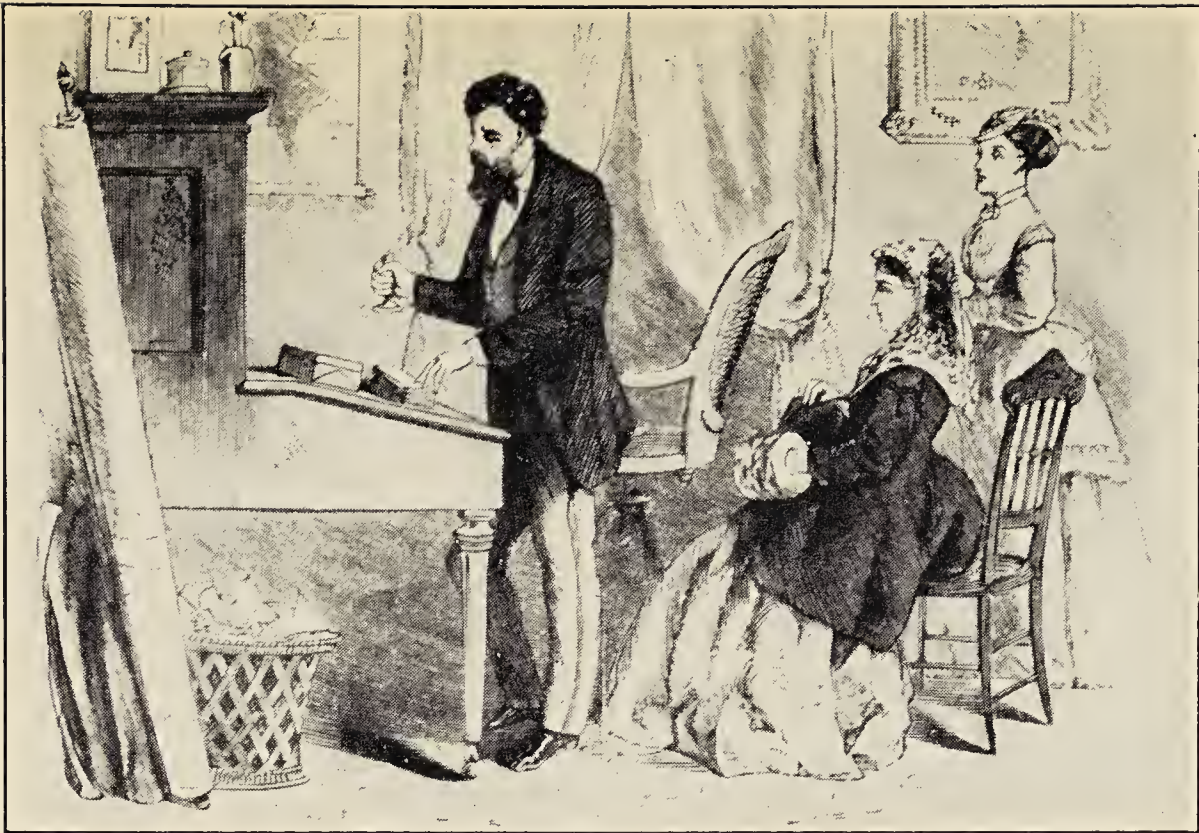
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the bill was overwhelmingly carried. The Commons had blundered, however, in making no provisions for noblemen's letters, and when the bill reached the Lords it was for that reason promptly thrown out. This made it necessary for the two Houses to "get together" on the subject, which they soon did, and then the measure went flying through, with both Lords and Commons on the free list.

But soon it appeared that not only was the post expected to carry letters free for M.P.'s and ministers, but merchandise and in fact everything up to and including cattle and human beings. In the *Agents' Letter Book* for the year 1703 are recorded the following franked articles:

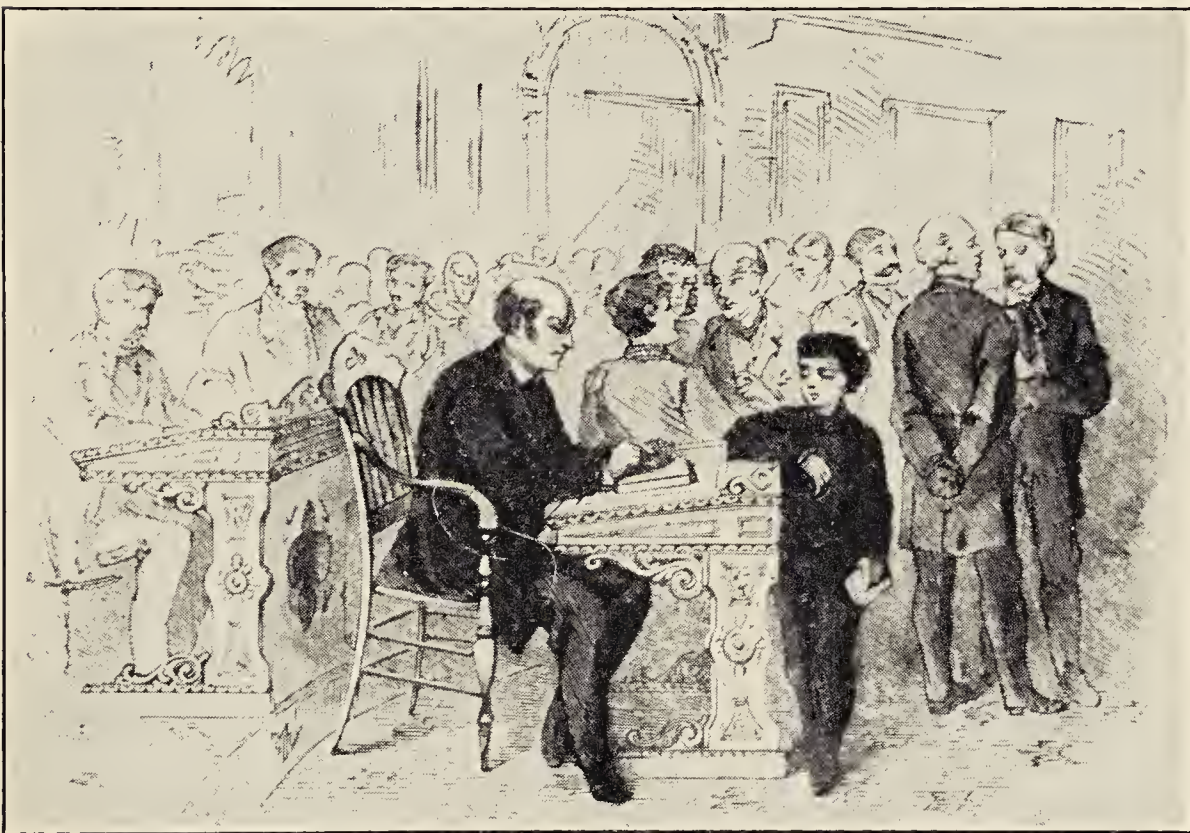
IMPRIMIS.—Fifteen couple of hounds going to the king of the Romans. *Item*—Some parcels of clothing for the clothing colonels for my Lord North's and my Lord Gray's regiments. *Item*—Two servant maids going as laundresses to my Lord Ambassador Methuen. *Item*—Dr. Crichton carrying with him a cow and divers other necessities. *Item*—Three suits of cloaths for some nobleman's lady at the court of Portugal. *Item*—A case of knives and forks for Mr. Stepney, her majestys envoy to the king of Holland. *Item*—Two bales of stockings for the use of the ambassador of the king of Portugal. *Item*—A deal case with four fitches of bacon for Mr. Pennington of Rotterdam.

During the eighteenth century the practice reached the proportions of a scandal. Members of Parliament not only franked their own letters, but obtained the privilege for an unlimited number of letters for other people. A member had only to write his name on a letter cover or a sheet of paper folded as a letter. Any nonmember might then address the letter, and it went free. Precisely the same condition existed in America a century later. Packages of such covers were given to friends who kept them on hand as we keep stamps and envelopes. Members' servants begged such parcels from their masters and then sold them.



From "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," 1869

CONGRESSMAN FRANKING WITH HIS RUBBER STAMP SIGNATURE A
QUANTITY OF ENVELOPES FOR LADY FRIENDS



From "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," 1869

CONGRESSMAN FRANKING A BATCH OF ENVELOPES AT THE REQUEST
OF A CONSTITUENT IN THE GALLERY

Franking

Forgers imitated the signatures of members. Through the two Houses of Parliament, comprising less than one thousand members, it was believed that there was a loss to the Post Office of £100,000 to £150,000 yearly in revenue.

One graft battens upon another, and some cleverly fraudulent methods of extending the franking privilege were devised. London booksellers and others who might fear to forge a member's signature did not hesitate to assume the name of a member, and under that name to have their letters delivered to them at a coffeehouse; and as the letters which a member received as well as those sent were free, this device worked like a charm. Not only this, but some of the swindlers' correspondents in the country also adopted the plan.

Postmasters, too, were presently included in the franking potlatch; and about 1730 Ralph Allen, postal contractor, discovered that postmasters were sending not only their own letters but those of their neighbors in big packets. He tried to break up the practice, but succeeded in enforcing only partial checks. In 1764 Parliament became a bit ashamed of itself and decreed—but not without agonized cries of protest from a considerable minority—that in future a franked letter must not only bear the member's signature, but that the whole of the address must be in his writing. Furthermore, no letters to him were to be exempt from postage unless addressed to his residence or to the Houses of Parliament.

In 1784 further restriction was ordered in that the day, month and year must be added in the member's own writing, and the letter must be sent on that day. Members frequently evaded this by post-dating covers for friends and constituents. Nevertheless, life now began to be more difficult for those who had been enjoying the privilege. The poet Cowper wrote to a friend in October of that year: "The privilege of franking having been so cropped, I know not

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in what manner I and my bookseller are to settle the conveyance of proof sheets hither and back again . . . for, like other authors, I find myself under a poetical necessity of being frugal."

That other literary men were not averse to using the privilege is proven by a letter of Sir Walter Scott's to a lady friend while he was in London. "Any parcel," he told her, "will reach me safely addressed under cover to Francis Freling, Esq., General Post Office." Freeling was a post-office official. When we remember, as already told in these pages, how Scott, like other great authors, was compelled to pay heavily for hundreds of letters and packets which meant nothing to him save that they were a nuisance, and when we learn that this particular letter referred to a poem which the lady was threatening to send to him for criticism, we can scarcely blame Sir Walter for accepting a little help from the Post Office whenever he could.

In 1795 a further restriction was put upon letter franking, but meanwhile another abuse had arisen, the franking of newspapers under Parliamentary signatures. A member could both receive and send newspapers free; and it was astonishing how many papers some members seemed to send. Large news vendors simply took over the names of M.P.'s, in some cases without troubling to mention the matter to them, and printed their signatures on their wrappers. Rowland Hill calculated in 1839 that the free newspapers weighed three and one-half times as much as all the other matter in the mails; while the franked letters and packets far outweighed the paid letters.

By the great postal reform act of 1840, Parliament forever abolished all its own franking privileges—something which the American Congress has never had the grace to do. The members of the French Assembly, too, have not enjoyed the benefits of franking for more than a hundred years. Napoleon I, who abhorred special privilege (for

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anybody save himself), permitted such grants only sparingly; but one of those with the most undoubted right to the privilege played a scurvy trick upon him. This was M. Bernard, Madame Récamier's father, one of the administrators of the posts, himself an ardent but of course a secret supporter of the Bourbons, who used his frank to distribute a royalist journal attacking Napoleon and his family.

From the very beginning of the American government, the franking privilege has been an Old-Man-of-the-Sea on the back of the Post Office. That "this is a free country" was originally taken to mean, in part, that everybody in official position should be permitted to send his letters and other mail matter free. Any one sufficiently well acquainted with an official or a member of Congress to ask favors might also enjoy the benefits of freedom. All others were, in the phrase of to-day, out of luck.

For years we had free newspaper carriage here, as they did in England. This subsidizing of the newspapers probably arose out of the fact that postmasters were the first publishers, therefore publishing was looked upon as a privileged business. Postmasters themselves enjoyed the frank up to 1845 and often misused it, just as in England. Many of them went in for the lottery business. In 1825 the postmaster at Canandaigua, New York, was dismissed for running a lottery agency and using his frank to promote it. In one year he had sent 3,080 free letters and received 1,397, all with regard to the lottery business alone. Postmaster-General McLean succeeded in getting a law passed which forbade postmasters to have anything to do with lotteries. Even then he had to fight the practice of sending lottery circulars as "newspapers."

But with the coming of those halycon days of spoil under Jackson it became evident that the frankers of preceding years had been mere amateurs. As a sample, the postmaster at the hamlet of Hawesville, Kentucky, in his quar-

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terly report, showed, "Free letters received and delivered to Hon. A. G. Hawes without waybills this quarter, 5,040." Hawes was the member of Congress from the district. Taking into account the comparatively feeble condition of the Post Office in 1833 and the strain of expansion under which it was laboring, one marvels that it stood up under the load.

But it seemed that Congressmen were still being deprived of some of their rights. Up to 1833 they could frank only during a session of Congress and sixty days before and after it. But in March, 1833, a new law was enacted by which a new M.C. began franking sixty days before his first session, continued it during his entire incumbency and until the meeting of the next Congress after he retired from office.

A man who died in 1834 was found to have had in his possession hundreds of a certain Congressman's franks, to use as he pleased. The representative in question once boasted that he could write his frank three hundred times an hour, if the sheets were properly arranged for him. Three hundred packages franked by a western representative came to a small Maryland town in one day. In 1839 Postmaster-General Niles said that free matter formed a goodly portion of the entire volume of the mails. During three weeks only of that summer the pamphlets and printed documents, copies of the *Congressional Globe*, speeches delivered and undelivered, campaign pleas, Patent Office reports, etc., amounted to sixteen and one-half tons. And yet "statesmen" castigated the Post Office for not being able to pay its own way!

Congress did one rather graceful thing in 1836 in bestowing the franking privilege upon Mrs. Dolly Madison. Thereafter it became a custom to grant it to all Presidents' widows—and certainly they were not numerous enough to burden the mails very heavily. It was given to Mrs. Polk



Jerry Buckley, First Carrier
at Nashville, Tenn., 1866



Ida Malott, Rural Carrier in
State of Washington, 1892



Genevieve Baskfield, City Carrier,
Zumbrota, Minn., 1926



Star Route from Rocky Bar to
Atlanta, Idaho, on Skis

AMERICAN POSTMEN, PAST AND PRESENT

Franking

in 1850. After that, all franking privileges were twice repealed (though not for long), but meanwhile the right had been granted to other widows by special act of Congress, so the Post Office Department arbitrarily continued to send Mrs. Polk's letters free until her death. In the latter eighties there were four widows—Mrs. Tyler, Mrs. Polk, Mrs. Grant and Mrs. Garfield. A curious reminiscence of ante-stamp days was seen in the fact that not only could they send their letters free, but all letters addressed to them went free, a provision which benefited the ladies not in the least.

Theorists were not wanting in 1840, both in and out of Congress, to insist that the government ought to carry all letters free, ignoring or ignorant of the fact that if citizens did not pay for the service as postage, they would have to pay in the form of taxes. They quoted Lord Ashburton's remark in the English campaign for cheaper postage that "a tax on letters is the worst of taxes," and, still better, the opinion of another Parliamentarian that "if there is any one thing which the government ought to do gratuitously it is the carriage of letters." Truly, it seemed that the government was very nearly doing that already; for during three weeks early in 1841 there were 22,038 free letters sent out from Washington—over a thousand a day. In one week in July 201,500 franked packages left that post office. In 1844 it was said that nearly fifteen thousand persons had the free use of the post office.

But those merry days were surpassed during the flush period following the Civil War. At one time in 1869 not less than a ton of free matter was leaving the Washington post office daily, only a small portion of which was franked in accordance with the law. Finding that their franking duties tended to produce writer's cramp, Congressmen had now taken to signing their names with a rubber stamp, and actually had large numbers of these signature stamps made

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for the use of their friends. Some Congressmen were said to frank practically the entire mail of their constituency. There were cases where a publishing house sent out the whole edition of a periodical under a Congressman's frank. As for the statesmen, they did not neglect their own personal advantage. Some of them sent their laundry home from Washington and back under frank. Mark Twain tells in *The Gilded Age* of a senator's franking seven big packing boxes full of clothing, boots and household effects and registering the shipment by means of fifteen cents' worth of stamps, so as to make the government responsible if anything was lost or damaged. No wonder the Postmaster-General in 1869 "hesitated to recommend" the project, then being urged, of a postal telegraph; the department was still unable to show anything but a deficit.

Let us hasten to say that there were some Congressmen too scrupulous to take any part in this orgy of privilege. One such was Senator Hannibal Hamlin, who had been Vice President under Lincoln. It is related of him that a man unacquainted with his sentiments on the subject once went to him with a batch of letters and asked that they be franked. Hamlin quietly took postage stamps from a drawer of his desk, stuck them on the envelopes and handed them back to the constituent.

Even in the harum-scarum eighteenth century, when privilege ran riot in England, the Post Office was shocked beyond expression when a member of Parliament franked thirty-three packets from Edinburgh to London, "most of them containing garden seed." This was such a scandalous violation of decency that the Postmaster-General, instead of delivering the packets, planned to carry them up to the Speaker's chair and expose the business right out in Commons. But the offending member got Lord North's ear, and the latter halted the action in time to prevent a public humiliation. How differently matters are regarded with us!

Franking

For decades past, garden seeds have been one of our Congressmen's favorite deadhead items. Twice has franking been done away with entirely (the last time in 1873), but the lawmakers could not do without it, and each time it has quickly come back. No longer do statesmen ship trunks of clothing and barrels of china free by mail, but the post is still burdened with free letters and with tons of Congressional Records, reports, "speeches" (spoken and unspoken), campaign literature, garden seeds and what not. If a fair percentage of this were eliminated, we outsiders might see our letters being carried for one cent, our magazines would be cheaper, perhaps the parcel post would be benefited and the department would have some funds for self-defense, so that it would not have to charge fifteen cents for registering a letter, as it does now.

CHAPTER XXVII

LETTER SPYING, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

There is no greater forger of letters than he who intercepts a letter.

MARTIN LUTHER

AS already hinted, the *curiosi* of ancient Rome were perhaps among the earliest spies on correspondence. The *Cursus publicus*, or postal system, of the Empire had become so vast an organization that there was a possibility that some of its functionaries might occasionally put it to private use, nay, even do a bit of grafting or whisper treason through it. Accordingly, there were *curiosi* or inspectors appointed to keep an eye out for such abuses, and it may readily be supposed that they looked into a letter now and then to see whether it really had to do with state business.

That scientific letter opening was understood and practiced in ancient times is proven by Lukianos of Samostate, who, in the second century A.D., wrote of the tricks of Alexander of Abonotichos, a charlatan who played postman to the gods, making them answer letters sent by mortals through his agency. The dupes were told to seal up their letters very carefully and give them to him (together with his fee, of course) and after a time he handed the letter back to them with the seal apparently unbroken, but marvel of marvels! with a reply inside from the god himself. Lukianos tells us that the faker had several methods of getting by the seal. For one, "he melted the part of

Letter Spying, Public and Private

the wax under the seal with a red-hot needle, removed the seal proper, read the contents, then melting again with his needle the wax on the letter, he easily reunited the two parts." Another way was to take an impression of the seal in clay and make a false seal, a method much used by advanced European nations sixteen and seventeen centuries later.

The courier service of the medieval monarchs was not free from spying, for the king at times thought it desirable to open a minister's letters to see whether or not the latter were really loyal to him. The wallet of a royal courier in a foreign country was not always safe, even though the monarchs of the two nations professed to love and trust each other like brothers. Cardinal Wolsey distrusted the ambassador to England from the Emperor Charles V, and the latter undoubtedly knew it, for he took extraordinary precautions with his correspondence. But the bold Wolsey, heedless of possible complications, gave orders that

a privye watche should be made in London and by a certain circuite and spaces aboutes it; in the whiche watche, after mydnyght, was taken passing between London and Brayneford, be certain of the watche appointed to that quarter, one riding towards the said Brayneford; who, examined by the watche, answered so closely that upon suspicion they searched hym and found secretly hyd aboutes hym a little pacquet of letters superscribed in Frenche.

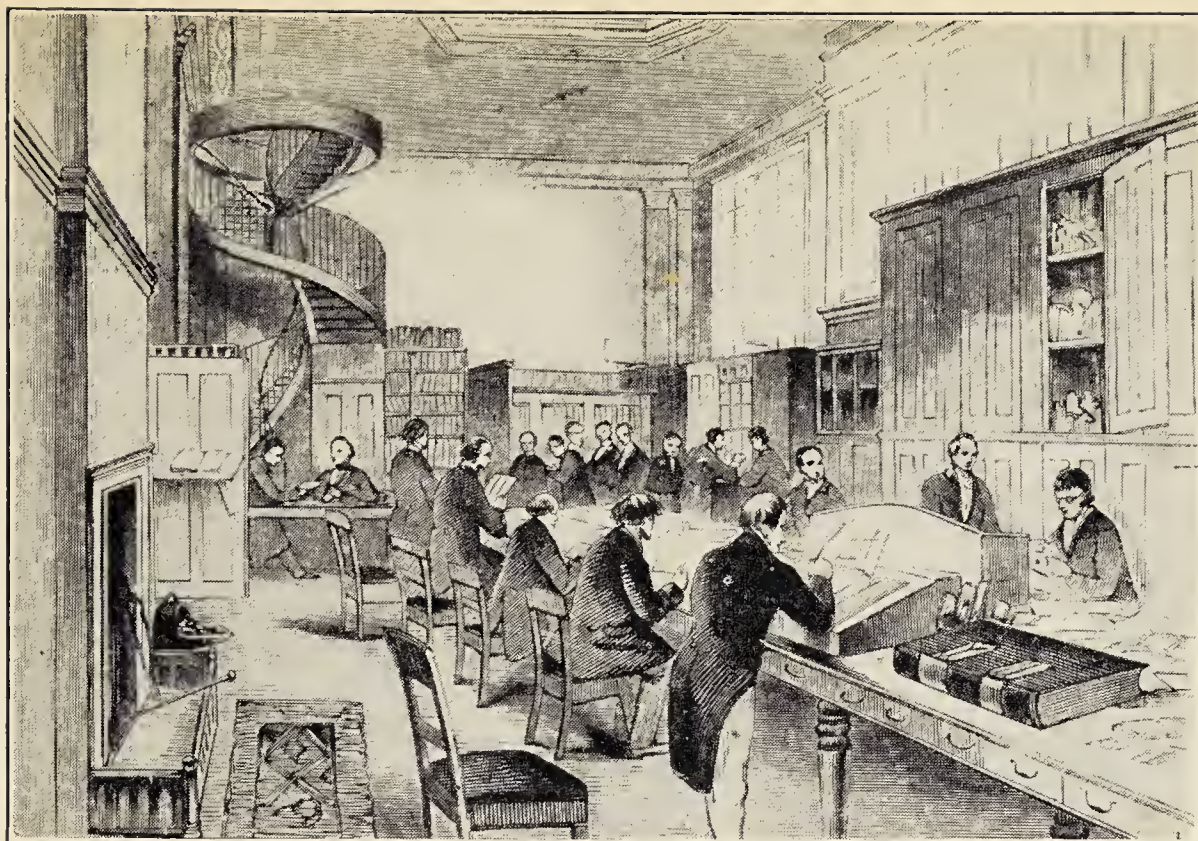
Whenever republics were set up, they—and even some of the more liberal kingdoms—made a great parade of holding all men's letters inviolable; but the beautiful sentiment was seldom carried out. Under the old criminal code of Milan, the breaking of a seal of another's letter was punishable by death. Nevertheless, ministers and officials thought themselves above the law when they suspected or pretended to suspect some one of treasonable meditations.

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Cromwell was one of those great republicans and friends of the people who had no respect for the sanctity of a letter. It is said that the opening by him or by some one under his orders of a letter from Charles I to his queen was the cause of the final break between king and Parliament. During his rule over Britain, Cromwell promoted a bill for the erecting of a public postal system in the country, and in the preamble thereof exhibited his ignorance of the meaning of true democracy by saying plainly that letters would be spied upon. The object of the act was not only to promote commerce and "convey the publique dispatches," but also "to discover and prevent many dangerous and wicked designes which have been and are daily contrived against the peace and welfare of this Commonwealth. The intelligence whereof cannot well be communicated but by Letter of Escript."

Letter spying was carried on constantly under the Commonwealth. At one time the Venetian ambassador remonstrated openly that his letters had been intercepted, and the charge was not denied. Queen Anne's postal act in 1711 forbade such opening save by an express warrant from one of the secretaries of state for each instance. At that very time the Duke of Marlborough was writing to his brilliant and impetuous wife:

My desiring you not to name any of the ministers in any of your letters is, from the certain assurance I have, of their opening all the letters which come to me. I know you are very indifferent as to their opinion of yourself; but the concern you have for me must in kindness oblige you never to say anything of them which will give offence; since whilst I am in their service, I am in their power. . . . So that I beg of you, as for the quiet of my life, that you will be careful never to write anything that may anger them; and for your own satisfaction, be assured that I know them so perfectly well that I shall always be upon my guard.



SECRET LETTER-OPENING ROOM, GENERAL POST OFFICE, LONDON, 1825



A FRENCH "CABINET NOIR," TIME OF LOUIS XV

Letter Spying, Public and Private

This letter he must of course have sent by a private messenger. Sir Robert Walpole, who was prime minister most of the time from 1715 to 1742, knew not how to govern other than crookedly. If the secretaries of state issued warrants for each individual letter which he caused to be opened, they must have been kept pretty busy. He even enlisted foreign officials in his service. His methods are illustrated in his spying upon Bishop Atterbury, whom he suspected of corresponding with the exiled Pretender. Exultingly, Walpole notified a colleague, Lord Townshend, that he had made an arrangement with "Mons. Jaupain, the post master generall of Brussells, who has engaged to open and send to me copies of all letters, supposed to be to or from the bishop; they are very long, and ev'ry tittle in cypher; I gave them to Mr. Wills on Tuesday, and he has not been yett able to decypher them."

It was largely through copies of these letters, attested by a clerk at the General Post Office, that Atterbury was convicted and banished in 1723. Not every man in the administration was as sneaking as Walpole. There was Pulteney, for example, for three years secretary of war. Sir Isaac Newton tells an anecdote of him which likewise shows that letter opening had in some quarters come to be regarded as one of the arts:

One morning a man came to him [Pulteney], offering his service, that he could open any letter folded in any form, could take a copy of the letter and make it up again in such a manner that the writer of the letter himself could not distinguish whether the seal had been touched or how the letter had been opened. The man withdrew into another room, a short letter was written, was folded up in the most artful manner, was sealed with a finely cut coat of arms and then sent to the man in the room adjoining. In a quarter of an hour the man returned with the letter and the copy of the letter, and neither Mr. Pulteney nor a friend who had been sitting with him at the time could discover

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the least trace of the letter's having been opened. The man therefore hoped that his honour would employ him or recommend him to some other person. He replied that he regretted that there existed such a dangerous enemy to society; so far from employing or recommending him, he would punish him if he had it in his power. "Go your ways," said he, "and seek your reward elsewhere."

But this skilled artisan was not lost to science. He next presented himself to Walpole, who saw at once that he could not do without so clever a fellow, and so set him to work in the "black cabinet" of the Post Office. And of course Pulteney himself was among those spied upon by Walpole.

Members of Parliament complained from time to time that their letters had been opened, and in 1742 an investigation was ordered, which resulted in some rather shocking disclosures. The committee report showed that Wills, the chief decipherer (mentioned in the quoted letter from Walpole) received a salary of one thousand pounds a year. Corbiere, the second decipherer, received eight hundred pounds. There were nine principal men and several underlings. Wills was a clergyman and dean of Lincoln. The disclosures made his position untenable, and he resigned; but curiously enough, he was promptly made Bishop of St. David's, and within a year, Bishop of Bath and Wells, which episcopate he held more than twenty years. Corbiere was also given a sinecure. All this indicated that there was no repentance in high places, but that the espionage would go merrily on—as, indeed, it did for another hundred years.

Eighteenth century letters of prominent personages are full of references to the evil. Often a letter begins with, "A safe opportunity of writing to you now presents itself," which means that the letter was being sent by the hand of a friend. The Earl of Chesterfield writes to the Earl of Marchmont, "Mr. Hume's going to Scotland makes me

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trouble you with this letter, which will consequently get to you unopened." Marchmont at Bath writes to Lord Stair in Edinburgh, and though his letter contains no treason, he sends it the whole three hundred and fifty miles by his servant, simply to insure privacy. Stanley writes to Grenville:

Though this letter contains nothing of consequence, I chuse to send it by a private hand, observing that all my correspondence is opened in a very awkward and bungling manner, which I intimate in case you should chuse to write anything which you would not have publick.

Wilkes, in a letter to Lord Temple, fumes at "the wickedness or even impertinence of an abandoned minister's coming at a sacred private correspondence." Letters sent by post came to be very cautiously worded, especially if the writer were one of the political "outs," as Temple was at this time. He once remarked that "I am so used to things of this sort at the Post Office and am so sure that every line I write must be seen, that I never put anything in black and white that might not be read at Charing Cross for all I care."

In 1766 Charles Lloyd wrote to George Grenville that "there is a great fracas at the Post-Office about a letter from the Duke of Bedford to the Duke of Grafton having been opened. Mr. Saxby is named as the person doing it, and it is under strict examination, I hear, to name who set him on to do it." Even an earl, it seems, felt it useless to complain of such espionage, but when it came to tampering with a letter from one duke to another, the dukes felt that this was going entirely too far.

Grenville himself, by the way, had just lost the premier-ship, and it is during his ministry that one finds a voucher to the secret service of the Post Office "for engraving the many seals we are obliged to make use of."

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Not only were letters spied upon for political reasons, but persons with influence could have the letters of a debtor opened to see whether he was concealing assets, and even the letters of young men and women were opened with a view to thwarting their love affairs.

Not so much was heard of political letter spying in the early nineteenth century, but the secret room was still quietly doing business, and it was said that some of its employees were grandchildren of the men who had worked there in William III's time. Letter opening had become an hereditary trade. Whole mails for the Continent were sometimes stopped and delayed for several days while being examined. Lord Spencer, the Home Secretary, endeavored to put a check on the practice in 1806 by requiring that the date of the warrant for each opening and the purpose for which issued be recorded. Nevertheless, some secretaries proved very free with the warrants. During the Chartist disturbances in 1841-1842 "roving commissioners" were sent into the northern industrial districts, where they opened letters by wholesale.

The secret office finally blew itself sky-high in 1844, however, when it opened the letters of Joseph Mazzini, the Italian revolutionary, then an exile in London, and reported their contents to Italy and other foreign governments. As a result of this tattling, it was said that thousands of persons were executed in Italy. The matter was brought to public notice by the opposition in Parliament, and caused great popular indignation. The whole secret service was now turned inside out, and the workings of that black cabinet upstairs in the General Post Office whose very location and existence were unknown to many other employees in the building, were described in full. When some unfortunate was under suspicion, his outgoing letters and the incoming bags supposed to contain his letters were quietly taken up to the secret chamber. There the seals on the letters were

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studied, and if there were not already duplicates of them on hand, molds were taken of them in bread or plaster of paris. The lower end of a long clay pipestem was then heated red hot, and by blowing through it upon the letter's seal, the wax was quickly melted, the letter was opened and copied, resealed with the false seal and sent on its way. So repugnant was all this to British public opinion that the secret office was presently abolished.

In France, as in England, the public had scarcely begun to use the mails in the seventeenth century when the government began prying into their letters. The infamous *cabinet noir* began its work during the reign of Louis XIV, and not only the king, but ministers, mistresses, court favorites, *et al.* used it to "get something" on each other. The Duke of Saint-Simon says in his memoirs:

The most cruel means by which the King was informed of what was passing—for many years before anybody knew it—was that of opening letters. The promptitude and dexterity with which they were opened passes understanding. He saw extracts from all the letters . . . that the chiefs of the post-office and the minister who governed it thought ought to go before him; entire letters, too, were sent to him, when their contents seemed to justify the sending. Thus the chiefs of the post, nay, the principal clerks, were in a position to suppose what they pleased and against whom they pleased. It is incredible how many people, justly or unjustly, were more or less ruined, always without resource, without trial and without knowing why.

Madame de Maintenon, the king's unacknowledged wife, succeeded in capturing a letter from the Duchess of Orleans, the king's sister-in-law, to a friend in Germany, saying some scandalous things about the royal pair, and by holding it over the duchess's head, reduced her to a pulpy state of humiliation and fear. The black cabinet was used even for other purposes than espionage. When news from the army was vague and unsatisfactory—as it was for a week after

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the battle of Blenheim—we are told that “all the private letters were opened” to see if any further news could be obtained.

Under Louis XV the secret office was, if possible, even more pernicious in its operations. In most countries of Europe in those days it was easy for an unscrupulous person to ruin an enemy merely by writing a letter to him, signing it with any name you pleased, either hinting therein at a plot in which he and the writer were supposed to be involved, or demanding a share of some fictitious graft, or hush money lest some treasonable matter be revealed. The suspicious and credulous authorities usually took the bait, and banishment or execution not infrequently resulted.

The revolutionary Constituent Assembly in 1791 proclaimed the inviolability of letters and forbade their being opened under any pretense whatever; but judging by what we know of the revolutionary leaders, one fancies that letter spying was done whenever some person in power desired information. Under the Directory and the Consulate, the Postmaster-General kept himself and his colleagues well informed. Napoleon, as First Consul, certainly ignored the law. General Kellermann, who, by his brilliant charge at Marengo, was said by many to have won the battle for Napoleon, was a sufferer by the practice. The Consul's high ambitions were by that time well known; and Kellermann, smarting because of lack of recognition of his achievement, wrote to a friend, “Would you believe it, that Bonaparte has not made me a general of division, though I have just placed the crown on his head?” The Postmaster-General showed Napoleon the letter; he never forgot it, and Kellermann never became a Marshal of France.

Apparently as a salve to Napoleon's conscience, the punishment for letter spying was greatly diminished in 1810; but such an amendment was nonsensical, for the law still remained in force, and the emperor still persistently ignored

Letter Spying, Public and Private

it. "Heaven knows how little respect was shown to the privacy of correspondence," says Bourrienne, his secretary for several years. Napoleon had the grace to be a little ashamed of the practice. He admitted to an Englishman that letters were opened in Paris, but pointed out that his ambassador's mail was opened in London, too. He urged that the system "was not an invention of mine," but of the Bourbons.

When Napoleon was sent to Elba in 1814, thousands of intercepted letters had been lying in the Paris post office for periods ranging up to three years. Bourrienne, whom Louis XVIII made director-general of posts, delivered them all, and thus three hundred thousand francs in postage was collected. Still the government could not keep its itching fingers out of private mail. By 1840 every French postmaster was being sworn to respect the inviolability of letters; and yet the police were stopping mail on the slightest suspicion, and continued to do so for many years afterwards.

Other countries were as bad or worse. In states like Russia and Turkey, private correspondence has never, since it was first admitted to the post, been safe. Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, during the troubled days of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, all did their share of letter picking. The little Grand Duchy of Berg in 1808 even took it upon itself to stop mail and couriers from its big neighbors, Russia, France and the other German states, and peer into the letters.

In America, when the colonists became more and more disaffected and mutinous, Tory postmasters and officials began spying upon the letters of known leaders among them, which finally led to the establishment of an American post line between the principal cities of the country early in 1775. Even after the Revolution there was too much curiosity as to the sentiments of public men, and some of them began writing to each other in cipher, especially after they had

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split into the two parties, Federalist and Demo-Republican. Madison writes to Monroe in November, 1784, "Your favor without date was brought by thursday's post. It brought a Cypher, for which I thank you, and which I shall use as occasion may require." To Jefferson, then in France, Madison wrote:

My two last, neither of which were in cipher, were written, as will be all future ones in the same situation, *in expectation of their being read by post masters.* I am well assured that this is the *fate of all letters* at least to and from public persons not only in *France but all the other Countries of Europe.* Having now *the use of my cipher, I can write without restraint.*

The portions here italicized were written in cipher, as also in the following bit of another letter from Madison to Jefferson, in which he mentions a call from Lafayette:

The Marquis this moment stepped into my room, and seeing my cyphers before me dropped some questions which obliged me in order to avoid reserve, to let him know that I was writing to you.

Jefferson, one of the most habitual users of ciphers when corresponding with colleagues, evidently used none in writing to his family and kinsmen, for in a letter from Paris to Francis Eppes, he says:

If your letters leave Richmond by the first of the month, addressed to the care of Neill Jameson, in New York, they will reach there in time to come by the packet of that month; and we are sure of receiving them, submitting only to their being privately read by the postmasters, as is the case in every country in Europe; should there at any time be anything which ought not to be read by any other, it will be necessary to desire Mr. Jameson to confide it to some passenger who will put it into my hand. By the French packet I shall receive your letters in seven weeks from their date.



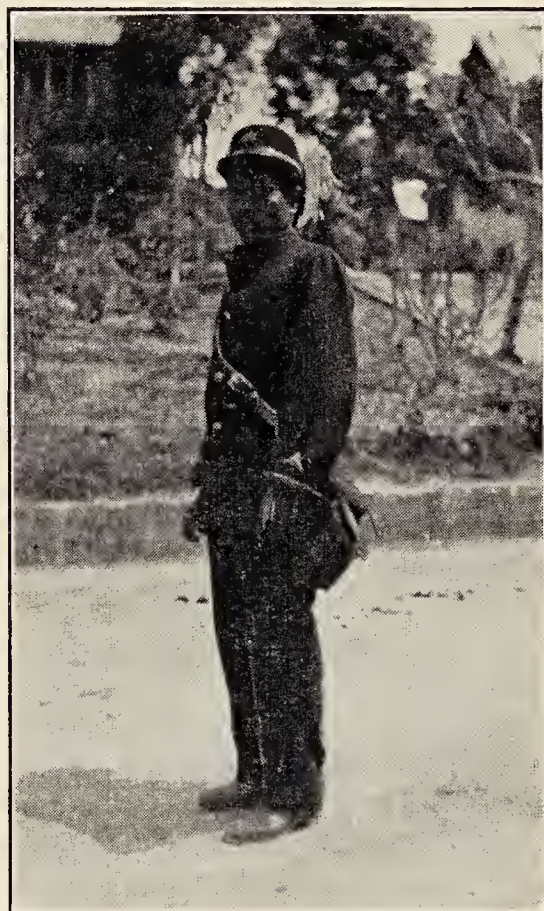
Reichspostmuseum, Berlin
Hartz Mountains, Germany,
1894



Compton's "Pictured Encyclopedia"
Africa



Landes Region, Southern France



Harry A. Franck
Trinidad

MODERN POSTMEN

Letter Spying, Public and Private

The use of a cipher in correspondence has often been unjustly cited against Aaron Burr as evidence of a sinister phase of character. As a matter of fact, such devices were employed by many prominent and upright men of the time as a defense against the "snooping" of perniciously political postmasters. The wily Jefferson frequently had his letters addressed by some one in his household and then sent them by a servant or friend to be dropped into some other post office than his own, in order that their origin might be unsuspected. When Hamilton in June, 1792, accepted Gouverneur Morris's invitation to correspond with him on political topics, he wrote:

Will it not be a necessary preliminary to agree upon a cypher? One has been devised for me which though simple in execution, is tedious in preparation. . . . In the meantime, let us settle some appellations for certain official characters. I will call the President Scaevola

The Vice-president Brutus, Secretary of State Scipio,
Secretary of War Sempronius, Secretary of the Treasury
Paulus

Attorney-general Lysander

Senators

Robert Morris, Cato

Rufus King, Leonidas.

Aaron Burr, Saeivius, etc., etc.

After the country had gotten a little better accustomed to politics, and the mail business increased so that leading postmasters had no time for such petty activities, letter spying declined greatly. The advent of envelopes made it still more difficult and uncommon. There was a curious outbreak in the early thirties, however, especially in 1835, when the abolition of slavery was first being vigorously urged in the North. The American Anti-Slavery Society became highly active at that time, issuing quantities of periodicals and pamphlets and sending out propaganda letters, many of which

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went to the South. Southern citizens became agitated over the movement, and feared that it would cause uprisings among the slaves; although, as not one in fifty of the slaves could read and had little chance of getting hold of any of the literature, the possibility of such trouble appeared rather remote.

At Charleston, however, a group of men broke into the post office and burned a quantity of the abolition material. The postmaster notified Washington that the mail bags were choked with the stuff, that "the public mind was highly excited" and he feared for the safety of the mails. He was therefore refusing to deliver antislavery pamphlets. Meanwhile Calhoun had introduced a bill in Congress, nicknamed the Gag Bill, prohibiting postmasters from receiving and forwarding any papers containing anything whatsoever relating to slavery—papers and pamphlets which in the South were called "incendiaries." The bill reached the third reading in the Senate, but was defeated. Postmaster-General Kendall, shiftily trying to cater to both sides, held up a few of the society's pamphlets on the allegation that they were violations of the postal laws, but let most of them through. To the Charleston protesters he wrote, agreeing that the literature was seditious and tended to promote discontent and servile war, but said he saw no relief for them save "in responsibilities voluntarily assumed by the postmasters"—which was equivalent to a suggestion to Southern postmasters to open the mail. And they did it. Every day in 1835, said a newspaper, "packages of anti-slavery papers and pamphlets are discovered and destroyed." Northern editors raged against the stoppages of newspapers as an infringement upon liberty, but in vain.

The labor of some southern postmasters in this humdrum task was occasionally lightened by a pleasant incident, such as that described in a letter, from one of them to a friend:

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Yesterday, while examining the mail in search of incendiaries, I discovered a letter written on a beautiful sheet of pink paper. I broke it open, and lo, and behold, it was a love letter from our old friend, Miss —— to young —— of this village. It would make you laugh to read it.

The abolitionists presently became more circumspect in sending forth their propaganda, and there were only occasional flurries of this sort between that time and the Civil War. During the great conflict there was considerable espionage, of course, but private letters went through and were treated with more respect than one might fancy. Americans are not by nature a suspicious people, and one thing which our government holds in the greatest abhorrence is any interference with letters, either public or private. The traditional country postmaster or postmistress who reads all the passing postcards is merely trying to beguile the tedium of a monotonous life. Perhaps if letters were not confined in envelopes but were merely folded sheets, as they were a century ago, there might be some peeping, as there was in the post office at Fairport, so amusingly described by Scott in *The Antiquary*. But rural life is now being made so much more colorful by increased automobile travel, the movies, the telephone, radio and other alleviations, that one doubts that rustic postmasters would exhibit the petty curiosity of a few decades ago. To-day we commit our most intimate and secret affairs to the post with the utmost confidence, and with never a fear that the matter will previously be seen by any eyes than those for whom it is intended.

CHAPTER XXVIII

POSTMEN OF THE AIR

The pigeons which convey letters are a miracle of God's almightiness which deserves to be admired and praised by us.

ABUL KASIM MANSUR

SOME have asserted that the first authentic instance of the use of the pigeon as a message carrier was on that occasion during the Flood (not the Johnstown nor the Mississippi disaster of 1927, but The Flood) when Noah sent the dove (or pigeon) out of the ark to see if conditions were getting back towards normalcy, and the intelligent bird presently returned with a sprig of greenery in its beak.

However that may be, the pigeon was undoubtedly carrying messages long before the birth of Christ. We have already noticed its use among the ancient Greeks and Romans. There are legends that other birds, too, were used for letter carrying in ancient times—the falcon, for example, and in China the gray goose. In commemoration of the latter service, the goose appears upon the modern postal flag of China.

The Moslem nations of the early Middle Ages were pigeon fanciers, and used the birds extensively for carrying news. The first reports of this were brought back to Europe at the time of the crusades. It was said that during the siege of Acre by Lion-Hearted Richard of England, the town kept up communication with Saladin, the Saracen leader, by pigeon. Another good story is that during the siege of Ptolemais the crusaders captured a pigeon carrying to the city news that the sultan was bringing an army to its relief, and would

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arrive in three days. The captors substituted a forged letter in which the sultan was made to say that he could do nothing at the moment, and released the bird again; and by this the town was so much discouraged that it promptly surrendered. When the sultan arrived three days later he found the stronghold in the hands of the Christians.

The Egyptian sultans used pigeons from very early times. It is told that a sultan of the twelfth century had two thousand of the winged messengers in service. Such importance and dignity were attached to the post that the sultan alone had the right to take the message from the bird when it arrived. No matter if he were eating or sleeping, when the message came, his meal or his repose were broken into for this ceremony. In Egypt, Syria and Persia, pigeons carried long-distance messages by relays, like human couriers. High towers erected at intervals were their cotes, and as soon as a bird brought a message into one of these stations, it was quickly forwarded by a pigeon which had been brought from the next station.

Crusaders and Dutch mariners brought specimens of these oriental pigeons to Europe, and European military authorities, taking a leaf from the Eastern book of wisdom, used pigeons frequently in their operations. One cannot accept all the reports of their achievements, but it seems probable that they were used by the Venetian Admiral Dandolo in the siege of Candia in 1204, at the siege of Haarlem by Frederick of Toledo in 1572 and of Leyden by the Spaniards in 1575, and coming down to a later day, at the siege of Antwerp by the French in 1832.

Early in the nineteenth century, when the lottery craze was in full blast, pigeons were sometimes used to hasten the announcement of the winning number, especially by shrewd tricksters. This was common between Paris, a great lottery center, and Brussels, a large consumer of lottery tickets.

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One operator, by means of very swift pigeons, gave his Belgian confederates the winning numbers, which they proceeded to buy up, if possible, before the official news arrived. In this manner the schemer acquired a considerable fortune; but his device was finally discovered, and being somehow construed as fraudulent, he spent the rest of his life at hard labor in the galleys at Toulon.

Nathan Mayer Rothschild, head of the London branch of his family's banking business, was one of the earliest of modern financiers to use pigeons to bring the latest market news from other capitals of Europe. He spent considerable sums on his pigeon cotes, and was always ready to buy birds noted for unusual speed. There is a story that he received by pigeon the news of the French defeat at Waterloo, which he at first pretended had been a British defeat, and thus made a killing on the Stock Exchange. But another story was that Nathan himself had been near the battlefield, and when he saw that French defeat was inevitable, he hurried to Ostend, paid a boat captain two thousand francs to carry him through a tempestuous sea to Dover, and hurried up to London ahead of the official dispatches.

Pigeons were thereafter used by stock brokers, especially in England and France (where they were called *pigeons de la Bourse*) until the invention of the electric telegraph. They usually flew between London and the French coast in an hour and a half. The poet Beranger was disgusted at the thought of their being put to such base uses. "Ye doves whom ancient muse harnessed to the cart of love," he complained, "whither do you take your flight? Alas! To Belgium you carry the price of the *rentes*! Thus . . . you transform yourselves from sweet messengers of Venus into stockbrokers."

England began using pigeons also to carry news of the results of her biggest racing events. Pigeons sent from Epsom reached London in twenty-five minutes, and in 1846



From "Harper's Weekly," by permission of Harper & Brothers

MAIL BALLOONS FROM PARIS PASSING OVER THE GERMAN LINES
DURING THE SIEGE, 1870

Postmen of the Air

one pigeon carried the story of the Derby to the metropolis in nineteen minutes. These carriers were sometimes shot, either for their news or by poachers to whom they represented only a meal. Such gunnery had to be done secretly, else one suffered a heavy fine for the offense. When yacht races took place, the newspapers sent pigeons out on boats to bring back the story quickly.

Julius Reuter, founder of the great press-dispatch service bearing his name, used pigeons on his first press line. Reuter was originally a Prussian government messenger. Observing the widespread public interest in the revolutionary movements of 1848, he decided to link all Europe together with a news transmission agency. In 1849 he established his headquarters at Paris. There were telegraph lines from Paris to Brussels, and from Berlin to Aix-la-Chapelle; and to hook these two together he established a pigeon line between Brussels and Aix. As the telegraph lines were extended in Europe, his service followed.

Probably the most famous pigeon messenger service in all history was that which was carried on during the German siege of Paris in 1870-1871. On September 1, 1870, the day of the battle of Sedan, La Perre de Roo, leading pigeon fancier of Belgium, foreseeing, as did many others, an investment of Paris, wrote to the minister of war, suggesting that in such a case, communication might be kept up with the provinces by means of pigeons. No attention was paid to his letter. When the Germans actually arrived before Paris, "L'Espérance," a society for the encouragement of pigeon-breeding, patriotically offered all its birds to the government. M. Cassier, the president of the society, tried to see General Trochu, but could get no farther than the general's secretary, who, with the assurance often found in such stations, jeeringly remarked that Cassier was the sixty-second person who had annoyed him on the subject, and he hoped he would be the last. The bewilderment of most

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of the functionaries of Paris at that time is well pictured by the correspondent of the London *Daily News*, in telling of his attempts to send a letter while the German pincers were slowly closing about the city.

As my messenger to the post office could get no authentic news, I went there myself. Everybody was in military uniform, everybody shrugging his shoulders and everybody in the condition of the London policeman who should see himself marched off to the station by a street-sweeper. That the Prussians should have taken the Emperor prisoner and vanquished French armies had of course astonished these worthy bureaucrats, but that they should have ventured to interfere with postmen had perfectly dumfounded them. "Put your letter in that box," said a venerable employe on a high stool. "Will it ever be taken out?" I asked. "Qui sait?" he replied. "Shall you send off a train to-morrow morning?" I asked. There was a chorus of "Qui sait?" and heads disappeared still farther within their respective shoulders. "What do you think of a man on horseback?" I suggested. An indignant "Impossible!" was the answer. "Why not?" I asked. The look of contempt with which the clerks gazed on me was expressive. It meant, "Do you really imagine that any functionary is going to forward your letter in an irregular manner?" At this moment a sort of young French Jefferson Brick came in. Evidently he was a Republican recently set in authority. To him I turned. "Citizen, I want my letter to go to London. It is a Press letter. These bureaucrats say they do not dare send it out by a horse express. I appeal to you, as I am sure you are a man of expedients." "These people," he replied, scowling at the clerks, "are demoralized. They are the ancient valets of a corrupt Constitution. Give me your letter; if possible, it shall go, 'foi de citoyen.'" I handed my letter to Jefferson, but whether it is on its way to England or is still in his partriotic hands, I do not know. As I passed out through the courtyard, I saw postmen seated on the boxes of their carts, with no horses before them. It was their hour to carry out the letters, and thus mechanically they fulfilled their duties. English Government officials have been jeered at as men of routine, but the most ancient

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clerk in Somerset House is a man of wild impulse and boundless expedient as compared with the average of functionaries here.

One by one the great city's communications with the outer world were severed. A telegraph wire cunningly hidden in the bed of the Seine was discovered by the Germans and cut. The Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs caused light copper balls to be made, in which letters were floated down the Seine by night; but the enemy soon discovered the trick, stretched a net across and gathered them all in. Rewards were offered to post-office employees who would cross the German lines with mail, and numbers of them tried it, but with varying success. Some displayed great courage and endurance—passing through the lines in disguise, traversing the catacombs and sewers under the city, hiding in stone quarries, struggling through storm and snow-drifts, faint with hunger and fatigue. One man remained hidden for nearly all of one winter day in the icy waters of the Seine. A few succeeded in going out and back once; at least two made more than one round trip; but the majority were captured, and some were never heard from after they passed through the fortifications.

The morale of the city suffered because of its total ignorance as to what the exiled government and the armies were doing, and whether there was any prospect of relief. At length, the sorely puzzled city guardians were forced to turn for aid to the despised pigeon. News could be conveyed *outward* by balloon (the first flight from Paris was made on September 23rd with five hundred pounds of mail) though there was no certainty that the stupid gas bag might not perversely carry its fateful cargo to Germany or into the sea; but the winds could by no means be trusted to pilot a balloon from any given point into Paris, though thousands of people in rural France wrote letters and tried to send them

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to the city, *par ballon monté*. Much hard study was put into the effort to find some way of guiding the balloons, and one genius thought he had solved the question. He recommended that four eagles be harnessed to the car and be guided by their efforts to reach a piece of raw meat attached to the end of a pole and held in the direction the aëronaut wished to go.

This idea was evidently not put in practice, for the Parisian balloons continued to land in various parts of Europe, sometimes just where they should not be. One traveled all the way to Norway and landed eight hundred and forty miles from Paris. Another fell into the North Sea and the aëronaut was drowned, but his letters were saved. The Germans devised anti-aircraft guns, but did not hit any of the mail carriers. One aëronaut told of seeing cannon balls come almost to his basket, then fall back. Some balloonists fell in or near the German lines and underwent heroic adventures.

The Parisian balloons were made of thin cotton cloth, covered with two or three coats of a varnish composed of linseed oil and oxide of lead, and were inflated with the illuminating gas used to light the streets. From Metz, during its siege, smaller balloons made of various materials were sent out without human occupants. The correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* planned the first one, which was made of strong white paper and inflated by means of a wisp of lighted straw under it, the stock of coal in the city being too small to permit the use of gas. It carried eight thousand letters in a rubber cloth wrapper, accompanied by a note promising one hundred francs reward to any one who found the package and took it to the nearest postmaster or the mayor of the commune and got a receipt for it. Others sent out later were made of thin paper lined with muslin, or of varnished cotton cloth, inflated with atmospheric air by means of a rotary fan.

To bring mail into Paris, Rampont, the Postmaster-

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General, decided to test the pigeon; and so, on the morning of September 25, 1870, he and an aëronaut left the city in a balloon, taking with them three pigeons and three hundred kilograms of letters. Ascents were preferably made with the wind in the northeast or north, so that the balloon might be carried towards Tours, whither Gambetta had gone in a balloon some time earlier. At five o'clock that afternoon two of the pigeons returned. Thereafter, a balloon ascended every two or three days. At first they carried only official dispatches, but later a private letter service was added. In all, sixty-four balloons left Paris.

Out of three hundred and sixty-three pigeons dispatched, only seventy-three returned. Among these, many traveled the route from four to six times. Perhaps not more than twenty pigeons therefore succeeded in carrying on all through the war. Night and winter storm discouraged them, and sometimes they decided to stop and take up their abode in some local dovecote. Some were perhaps shot by heedless sportsmen, some may have been caught by the hawks which the Germans imported to combat them. The French did not much fear the last-named disaster, the pigeon being a faster flyer than the hawk, and they did not even equip their pigeons' tails with little whistles to frighten away birds of prey, as is done in China. Despite their failures, the birds brought into Paris one hundred and fifty-six thousand official dispatches in four months, to say nothing of one million private letters.

For centuries it was the custom to attach the letter, very brief and written on the thinnest known material, around the pigeon's neck or under its wing. But about 1840 it became the practice to roll the message into a small spill and attach it to the central feather of the bird's tail, which remains stationary while it is flying; or cut off the end of this quill and slip the message inside, a method not highly

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practical because the quill is so small. But during the siege of Paris it became the custom to use as a carrier a section of goose quill about two inches long, which was lashed with silk thread to the bird's main tail feather.

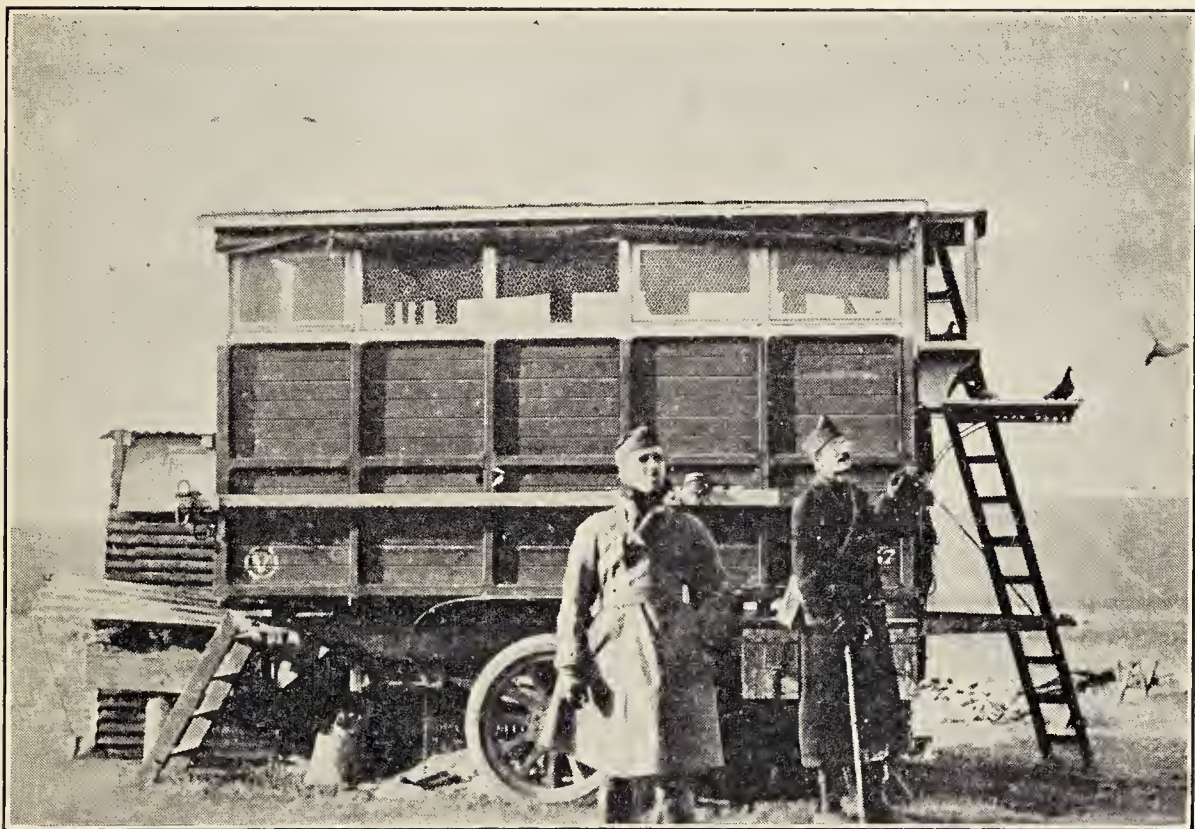
One device after another was tried to enable a pigeon to carry a greater wordage. The first idea was merely the writing as small as possible and in cipher on the thinnest of paper; but by this method often no more than two or three short dispatches could be carried by one bird. The second idea was that of reducing the dispatches to a very small compass by photography. But penmanship when reduced so greatly was hard to decipher, and so the dispatches were next set in type and printed, then photographed down to miniature size. Finally the best idea of all was hit upon; namely, the printing of the microscopic letters upon thin films of collodion. One of these sheets held, on an average, twenty-five hundred letters and dispatches; and as one bird could easily carry a dozen of the films, it was possible to forward thirty thousand communications at one trip. At one time a single pigeon carried eighteen pellicles—forty thousand letters; and as the rate for sending a letter by pigeon post was about ten cents a word, with twelve cents added for registering the letter, this one bird's cargo was worth nearly fifty-six thousand dollars in postage! Dispatches and registered letters were sent repeatedly until acknowledged by balloon post from Paris. In this way some communications were repeated twenty and even thirty or more times.

The microphotography was at first done with ordinary cameras at Tours, but later, finer instruments were sent out from Paris in a balloon which had a narrow escape. It was fired upon for an hour, a balloon accompanying it was punctured, and the instrument balloon itself was finally forced to descend and fell into the hands of the Germans, though the men escaped with the instruments. To enlarge



From United States War Department

"PRESIDENT WILSON," A DISPATCH CARRIER WHO LOST A LEG IN THE
GREAT WAR



From United States War Department

A PORTABLE PIGEON COTE AT THE FRONT IN FRANCE

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the letters again in Paris, clerks at first used powerful microscopes. The next plan was to throw enlargements of the films on the screen with stereopticons, so that several clerks could transcribe letters at once. At last the idea was hit upon of reproducing the letters in their original size on collodion, cutting them apart with scissors, pasting them on sheets of gummed paper and forwarding them to the addresses, thus saving all transcribing. At first it might take a week or ten days to decipher and copy the letters brought by a single pigeon, while the city waited in an agony of suspense. One of the most plaintive laments that came out of the beleaguered city from time to time was, "We have had no pigeon for eight days" (or more). Of the longest of these blank stretches, the *Daily News* correspondent wrote, on January 6, 1871, "Of all the privations of the siege, none has been more hard to endure than the want of news. No pigeon has come into Paris since the 19th of December, and the news it bore was dated the 14th." Two days later a pigeon arrived with fifteen thousand letters.

During this war, the French route for the Anglo-Indian mails was necessarily abandoned. As Calais was about to fall into the hands of the Germans, the mail was landed for a time at Dieppe, then at Cherbourg and St. Malo, and then the French route was abandoned altogether, and the mail sent through Belgium and Germany, via the Brenner Pass to Brindisi. The French route was resumed in 1872.

After this modern demonstration of the value of pigeons, they were taken up by nearly all the European armies, and special attention given to their breeding and training. During the recent Great War in Europe they were extensively used. The First and Second American Armies in France had one thousand birds each, and the Third Army six hundred and forty. Counting the instruction and breeding sections, we had over five thousand three hundred pigeons in France.

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In the Meuse-Argonne offensive, 442 American pigeons were used, and 403 important messages delivered by them. One bird delivered fifty messages. The pigeons were carried from their automobile "lofts" to the trenches in baskets slung on soldiers' backs. There were gas-proof bags for the baskets in case of a gas attack. But a pigeon might be liberated during such an attack and come through safely, presumably because it rose above the gas. The pigeon-veterans' home at Fort Monmouth still houses many veterans of the Great War, some of them bearing honorable scars. "Cher Ami," who lost a leg on the Verdun front, frequently delivered messages over a thirty-kilometer course in twenty-four minutes. "The Mocker" had an eye shot out. "President Wilson" was liberated with an important message on November 5, 1918, during an intense machine gun and artillery fire, and reached his loft at Rampont, forty kilometers distant, in twenty-five minutes. On the way one leg had been shot off and his breast pierced by a bullet. The message was still hanging to the ligaments of the torn leg. A few months ago President Wilson was still alive at Fort Monmouth.

The next device to be used for the mail was the airplane. For centuries men have been trying to fly, and it may surprise some readers to learn that more than a hundred years ago a suggestion was made that mail be carried by flying ships. The editor of the *Freeman's Journal*, of Norristown, Pennsylvania, in 1822 recommended that the Postmaster-General consider the matter of using "the very ingenious flying machine invented by James Bennett" for the forwarding of the mails. The only fault with the suggestion was that Bennett's machine never flew.

One R. O. Davidson of St. Louis petitioned the Senate of 1840 for an appropriation of not less than two thousand dollars and not more than five thousand dollars "to test an experiment for carrying the mail through the air." He

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asserted that it could be conveyed at the rate of one hundred miles per hour; "that *his plan is indubitably correct*, as it rests upon a principle founded in nature, adopts a form drawn from nature, and employs manual power to put it in motion." Senator Linn said "the memorial was a well-written document, showing Mr. Davidson to be a man of science and a scholar"; but as to the practicability of the idea, he was not prepared to say. Senator Benton "hoped his colleague would lay the memorial on the table without having it printed," upon which we are told that there was "a general smile through the Senate." And so poor Davidson never got his allowance, and the Senate never learned whether he had a flying machine in mind, whether he proposed to build little aërial tramways or shoot the letters from guns.

In more recent years, as flying became more and more of a practical thing, the suggestion was inevitable that it be used for the mails. In America the first test of air mail was made as long ago as May, 1918, when the army and the Post Office Department, coöperating, set up an experimental route between New York and Washington. Army fliers were used at first, but after three months the Post Office took the line over and employed civilian pilots. This, the first nonmilitary air transport service in America, did not last long, as the course was too short to pay well. Later, other short and disconnected lines were tried between New York and Cleveland, Cleveland and Chicago, Chicago and Omaha; but there was the same objection to all of them—they were too short to give the plane any great advantage over the railway. But much valuable data for the executives and training for the pilots were gained in the operation of these short routes, and the authorities were convinced that air-mail carrying on a large scale was practicable.

By 1921 the department was ready to venture a bit farther into the fascinating game. That year they installed a line

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between New York and San Francisco whereon the planes flew only in daylight, the mail being taken from them at dusk and hurried on during the night by railway trains, to take to the air again early next morning.

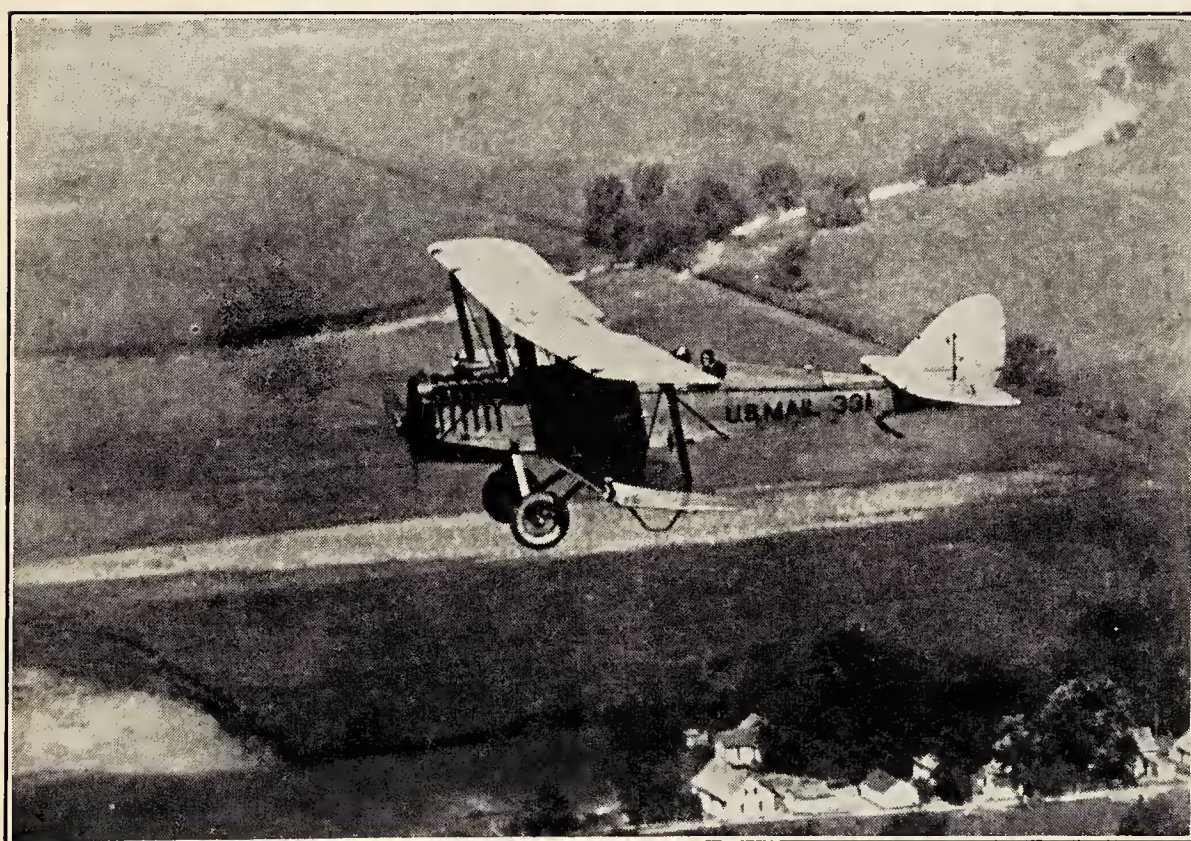
But of course ambition could not long endure that piecemeal system. Other planes were flying by night—why not the mail? To attain this end, a thousand-mile stretch from Chicago to Cheyenne was equipped with beacon lights and flood-lighted landing fields, and in 1923 a test was made of continuous flight across the continent, with only short stops to change planes and pilots, to take on fuel, refreshment and way mail. In this test, a trip was made from New York to San Francisco in twenty-six hours, fourteen minutes—faster than it is now done by regular schedule.

On July 1, 1924, the regular daily transcontinental mail service was launched over the longest air mail route in the world. Eastward the trip occupied thirty-two hours and five minutes, westward thirty-four hours and forty-five minutes, the planes always spending the night on the lighted stretch between Chicago and Cheyenne. But one year later the great lighthouses had been strung from New York and Chicago, and night mail service was begun between those cities. The row of beacons had also been extended from Cheyenne to Salt Lake City, and were promised on to San Francisco.

This transcontinental air service has proved to be not only the fastest but one of the most efficient of all long mail lines, registering very few failures and very little tardiness. Since it was installed, branches have sprung out from it like the magical plants of a Hindu conjurer. Boston, Detroit, Pittsburgh, St. Paul, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Denver and Pueblo were soon connected with it, a long branch was thrown out from Chicago to Kansas City, Wichita, Oklahoma City, Dallas and Fort Worth, another from Salt Lake up through Boise to Pasco, Washington, two more from



THE MAIL PLANE IN SIAM
Note the national emblem on its side



AMERICAN MAIL PLANE IN FLIGHT

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Salt Lake and San Francisco to Los Angeles, and another shooting northward from San Francisco through Portland to Seattle and Victoria, British Columbia. As this book goes to press, we have just linked arms with eastern Canada and with Mexico, so that letters may now shoot through the air from Montreal to Mexico City; and beyond Mexico, lines are already planned through Central America to Panama and Colombia. Here at home, new networks have taken in Atlanta, New Orleans, the great cities of New York State, of Ohio, Indiana, Texas, Florida—there seems no limit to the dreams which are coming true so rapidly that they are no longer laughed at.

In far-off Alaska mail planes have been flying over certain courses for four years, and are considered to be menacing the livelihood of the mail-sled dog and the reindeer. Canada is sending mail to her miners and pulp workers in far northern Ontario and Manitoba by plane, displacing the dog sled. Mail is traversing the air, not only all over Europe, but in Asia, Africa, South America, Australia and the isles of the seas. In Colombia, where fifteen years ago the weighing and registering of a small package of films at a city post office detained Harry Franck for an hour and twenty minutes, now the air mail flies, and one fancies that the postal processes have been speeded up a bit. In Siam, where in 1883, the king, when trying to establish a postal service, wrote to the Universal Postal Union that "it will be difficult to organize a postal system in Siam, and the Siamese will hardly understand its use and advantages. It will certainly not yield revenue to the Government, for correspondence in Siam is too limited"—there, to-day, mail planes with the national white elephant emblem on their sides cleave the air.

This book is a history of the past, not the present—of the old methods, not the new. Therefore, no extended notice of air-mail service is possible. The mail plane is making

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history so rapidly, anyhow, that nothing short of a daily or a weekly publication could deal with it adequately. Less than a year ago, at the end of June, 1927, Commander Byrd and his daring crew carried the first bag of mail by plane across the Atlantic. Who can deny that such conveyance may at no distant date be a regular thing? In fact, the English are even now completing a huge dirigible designed for passenger and mail service between their country and ours. They are likewise establishing an air mail line to India and planning to extend it to Australia. The French have just launched a mail plane service to South America. The planes fly from France to Senegal in Africa; thence the mail crosses by fast steamship to Natal, Brazil, whence it hops by plane again to Rio Janeiro and Buenos Aires. The narrowest part of the Atlantic is that between Africa and Brazil, and no doubt airships of some sort will be flying across it soon. Many of us will live to see the air mail girdling the globe.

Strange are the cycles in human social history! A century ago—yea, less than that!—the public letter writer was a common functionary in European cities, as he is yet in some parts of the Orient. But at the same time, there were people in those same European countries who were writing letters that are classics—letters such as may never be written again. The art of beautiful letter writing has declined with the advance of our so-called civilization. The telegraph, the telephone, the radio, facilities for quick travel from place to place and the profound absorption of the individual in the seething affairs of the moment are driving friendly letter writing out of vogue. The vast majority of the letters which now pass through the mails have to do with business. A significant news item was that recent one from Northwestern University which told how three young ladies were paying expenses by writing letters for their fellow students. So here we are, back again to the public letter writer of a

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century ago, only now it is not because of our illiteracy but because our high civilization leaves us little time or inclination to write. We may even go to a news stand and select one of several cards addressed, Dear Brother, Sister, Family, Boy Friend, Girl Friend, and all bearing the same legend: "It is very—hot, cold, pleasant, stormy, disagreeable. I am—well, not well, broke, lonesome," etc. We pick out the one with the proper greeting, check thereon the weather report and the sentiment desired, and there is our letter! Shades of Chesterfield, Swift, St. Paul, *et al.*, what would you think of that if you knew?

And yet the history of postal service has been the history of civilization. As Emerson has pointed out, the power of a tiny stamp to carry a letter around the world, its contents a secret save only to the writer and the receiver, is a fine proof of human progress. That letter writing is no longer practiced as one of the arts does not mean that we are losing our grip on art. Genius in future will merely extend itself in other directions. But one ventures to predict that ages must pass before the human race will be able to get along without mail service—if, indeed, it ever does.

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